

Daniel 3

Our True Home

For Daniel and his friends, their true home was Israel. And their identity was that of being a part of God's people, descendants, and heirs of King David. They lived with identities and values that was different to the time and place that they found themselves. They waited for God's people to return to their home.

For us today, our true home is with God in heaven. Not a mystical heaven in the sky but rather a home that is being prepared, a home that we will one day live in forever, here on earth. Our identity is that we are saved by Christ and invited to be a part of God's people because of what Jesus has done for us and in us. And so, with this identity we live instead in Australia in 2024: which isn't all bad.... but it most certainly is not all good.

None of us live in a world that shares the values of our true home. We live with an identity and with values that is different to the time and place that we find ourselves.

The Big Question

Daniel 3 asks us the question...what would we do when this time and place asks us to betray the ultimate value of our true identity and home....that being that God is the only God...and that he is the only one who deserves our worship? What do we do when we are asked to give our worship to another?

The Statue and The Furnace

Nebuchadnezzar's policy was that you can have your God, but you still must swear absolute loyalty to the state...which might be fine in some circumstances, perhaps there are some red flags there at the very least...but in this circumstance loyalty had to be demonstrated through a public ceremony of "worship" towards a gold statue measuring about 30 metres high or to put it another way, a golden statue measuring 3 of the Heights Church buildings stacked on another.

No person could reasonably refuse to give a token or worship to the emperor and to the government in the form of this statue. If any of the officials brought before the statue refused to comply, they were to be immediately executed in a superheated furnace which was built nearby.

Furnaces in Babylon were built with brick and resembled railway tunnels if they only had one entrance. They used charcoal as fuel producing very high temperatures, up to 1000 degrees Celsius.

Dobbed In

Some Chaldean men, motivated politically and perhaps out of jealousy from the events of Daniel 1 and 2, do in 3 men who wouldn't bow to the statue: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

The Heat is Turned Up

Imagine the enormous pressure on Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego to compromise. Everything in front of them – the king, the furnace, the music, their compatriots, their competitors – all of it conspired to convince them to compromise. Yet God was more real to them than any of those things.

They had **no need** to defend themselves. Their guilt in the matter was clear – they clearly would not bow down to this image. They declared that God was able to save them but even if he didn't, they wouldn't worship another.

Scripture contains few more heroic words than "But even if he does not"

An Angry King and a Mysterious Figure

Nebuchadnezzar was furious.

You can tell he was furious because furious people make irrational, over-the-top pronouncements.

He not only orders their execution by fire in the furnace he goes to absurd lengths to ensure that the punishment would be total.

Any human being would be burnt to a crisp immediately in a furnace as it was...but Nebuchadnezzar insisted that additional bellows be inserted under the coals so that it could be turned up 7 times the usual heat which ended up being fatal to the people who got even too close to it. He ordered that the 3 men be fully dressed, turbans and all apparently, and that not only would regular soldiers take them to the furnace but he wanted the strongest ones on hand to do the job...and finally he wanted to make sure that they were firmly tied up so that they could be thrown into the furnace like logs.

At this point the story shifts to the point of view of Nebuchadnezzar and it's here where he reminds me a little bit of the Grinch when he discovers that stealing all of the presents, the food for the feasts, and even the Christmas trees doesn't mean that he has stolen Christmas. The Grinch cups his ears to hear the sad cries of the Whovillians on Christmas morning and instead he hears defiant and cheerful singing. Nebuchadnezzar peers through the flames to make sure that these 3 disloyal Jews were crisp and ash but instead it says he "leapt 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, Your Majesty."

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."

Something supernatural and unexplainable was taking place. Not only were these 3 men unburnt

and okay in the fire...they had been joined by a fourth figure. God was present with these men. Nebuchadnezzar had imagined that there was no god who could rescue these men, but the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego could and in this case he did. Not a single hair on their heads, not a single inch of their robes had been burnt and as Nebuchadnezzar did the only thing, he could which was to now ask them to step out of the fire to explain themselves...we are told that there wasn't even a smell of fire on them.

The Christian Today

It is not always easy being a Christian in our world today. Being a Christian makes you different. Being a Christian will at least occasionally make you stand out from a crowd. It means that you will be perceived as bigoted, arrogant, narrow-minded, delusional, naïve, self-righteous. It will mean people will think your lifestyle is weird. You will go to things that others will not, and you will not go to some things that others will. You will participate in things that many in your world will scoff at, be confused by, or dismiss. And you will choose, by following God, to live your life by his design and plans when others will think its dumb and tempt you will common sense to give it up.

We are prompted by the world to prioritise wealth over him, to eat, drink, and be merry in the same way that the world does, we are tempted to compromise on sex, on deception, on faithfulness.

I'm not encouraging us this morning to feel like victims hard done by our circumstances. No- I'm encouraging us to remember who we have on our side and to remember that the God we worship is powerful and true. That he is bigger, better, and more worthy than any other idea, cause, or power in our lives.

While God did not have to rescue Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego...., on this occasion God intervened. We know from the Bible, from history, and even from our own experiences that God does not always intervene. God gives no guarantee of rescuing us, but he does guarantee his presence when we suffer. The point of the fourth figure in the fire, which many assume to be a pre-incarnation Christophany, basically Jesus making a cameo appearance in the Old Testament. The point of this figure showing up is to show us that when we suffer, he will be there. When we go through trial he will be there. When we have the heat turned up on our faith...and we don't budge when it comes to who deserves our loyalty and worship...God will be there.

The divine figure in this story doesn't show up until the fire...and he doesn't go with them out of the fire. The purpose of this figure wasn't to bless their lives. It wasn't their promotion. It was to be deeply present with these men in what was going to be the scariest moment of their lives. They stood up for God and he stood right there with them. And I want to suggest to you that God does the same and will do the same for you.

He doesn't guarantee deliverance from the fire like he does here, but he does guarantee that those who step out for him, who take a risk for him, who are faithful to him despite all opposition, to those who worship him and him alone...and for those willing to stand up for God and say that he is able to deliver..."BUT EVEN IF HE DOES NOT"he will be right there with you too.