

Daniel 3 – Who will you worship?

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Main Point – Even when it costs, trust and worship only the Lord

In **2009 Lillian Ladele(SLIDE)**, was a registrar of births, deaths and marriages in London. She held Christian beliefs about marriage.

Lillian was sacked after asking to be excused from performing homosexual partnership ceremonies, for reasons of conscience. Even though she'd offered to swap shifts with other registrars who were happy to perform them.-----

She ended up losing her appeal.-----

Sometimes when you worship the Lord, it costs you.-----

On 24th March this year **Islamist militants** attacked a coastal town in Northern Mozambique, killing dozens, and forcing thousands to flee(**SLIDE**).

Boats rescued some, but people were captured, killed and children were dying in the bush. Barnabas Fund reported that anyone who refused to support the jihadists and embrace their beliefs were attacked, and their property burnt. Thus Christians who refuse to deny Christ were among the victims.-----

Sometimes when you worship the Lord, it can cost, even your life.-----

Today we see three other men who are also willing to lay down their lives, in order to resist idolatry and worship only the Lord.-----

I wonder if you think it's worth it?-----

Today from Daniel ch3 we'll cover three points, 3 R's, before we consider Our Response.

The **first point is, The Real Challenge.(SLIDE)**-----

[The book of Daniel is set in 600BC when the Babylonian empire had defeated Israel, and taken people from Jerusalem as slaves to Babylon, including Daniel and his 3 friends named in ch3 – men who trusted the Lord and were given wisdom by God]

[Remember last week] in ch2 [how] King of Babylon Nebuchadnezzar had the/a dream with a huge statue representing 4 human kingdoms, and Neb was the head of gold.

Well it seems it just gave him the idea of building a statue.

But it's not just the head that's gold, the whole thing is.

And it's 8 stories high.

We don't know it was shaped like Nebuchadnezzar, or Neb as I'll call him, but it's very tall and thin.

Which may also hint at its instability.-----

While the point of Neb's dream in ch2 was that God gave him his power, and his kingdom which wouldn't last, it seems Neb resists that.-----

For Neb the statue says, my kingdom will endure, and 'I demand your political and religious loyalty'.-----

B/c allegiance to and worship of god, king and nation were closely interwoven.-----

In **v4**, the officials from all nations and languages were commanded to worship the gold statue, the idol.-----

Daniel, who's likely writing here, describes the events with mocking humour.

The repetition of all the rulers and officials in v2 and v3, then the repetition of the long list of instruments in v5, v7, 10, and 15, is portrayed by the Jewish author as comical.

It's like people are robots, and in response to the music they all just bow down, fall down.

Their idolatry is being subtly mocked.-----

Yet, it's also most serious isn't it?

For if you don't bow down and worship the statue, **v6**, you shall 'immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire'.

This presents all of God's people who worship the true and living God, with a problem, a real challenge.

The Jews working as officials for Neb: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, faced a real challenge.-----

We're not told where Daniel was at this time, maybe he was away on a business trip.

But what is happening here is an uncompromised command to submit to workplace idolatry.-

It's clear in v12, 14 and 18, that not bowing down to the statue means Shadrach Meshach and Abednego failed to serve Nebuchadnezzar's gods or worship the statue – the 2 activities are connected.-----

In the context of their work for the crown, these 3 men are obligated, commanded to bow down before and worship an idol, a false god.-----

Maybe your idol is your sport, your comfort, your gaming, your family, that thing which matters most to you and you look to for meaning.

But what **idols you're tempted to or pressured to worship** in your workplace?----

While it won't be a statue, what heart-idols or counterfeit gods, are you tempted or pressured to worship, serve, live-for, in your school or workplace?-----

Is it the idol of **success** – getting those results that put you at the top of the class, or top of the pack?-----

Is it success in the sense that you're striving for that next promotion, next raise, or next job, that will help you rise up the corporate ladder?-----

Maybe you're surrounded by people all competing for that success?-----

Or is it success that's measured in monetary gain for your company or you personally, n' money matters more than anything?-----

Or is it about **status** – wanting that promotion, that career so you can be the best and have others acknowledge you are the best?-----

Maybe the drive for success or status is what's motivating you to work long hours every day, every week, so work has honestly become your life, the thing that matters most to you.-----

Maybe you're being pushed to give work your first priority?-----

Or maybe the idolatry pushed in your school or workplace is something different, and an LGBTI inclusive agenda, that requires that everyone promote and actively support that agenda.

[As Neil touched on in Daniel 1], Steve McAlpine in his book **Being the Bad Guys**, asserts that our society preaches a different and false Gospel:

That your gender and sexual identity, which you can determine, is the real you.

And the real you, and meaning and purpose and flourishing, is found by looking within.-----
(Maybe that's what you believe yourself?)

But for us who know and have been saved by Christ, the thing that defines me most is not my sexuality, but my status 'in Christ'.

By trusting in Jesus we're joined to him by faith, and become God's son or daughter.---

That is the identity I want to remember for myself, define me; and teach to my kids.

That's what I want the people around us to hear of – our identity in Christ, as children of God.-----

Is that what defines you?-----

For in Steve McAlpine's words, (**SLIDE**) 'Sexual identity is the new religion: the thing proclaimed as the locus of deep and lasting meaning, where the truly authentic self is experienced. Sex is the new imperial cult, and leaders and influences who promote this new faith look no more kindly on disobedience than a group of scheming Persian administrators'.
(p113)

Do you feel that at your school or your workplace?-----

We are to love LGBTI people, but do you feel the pressure to approve of, promote, the LGBTI agenda?-----

Yet IS the goal in life and pathway to happiness found in being true to yourself?---No.

We are all wired to worship, but if we direct our love inward, and think we can find happiness and flourish by looking within, we only worship the idol of ourselves.-----

And we'll never truly be satisfied, nor saved.-----

Are you worshipping or tempted to worship the idol of self, and your own pleasure?-----

Whatever idol worship we're having pushed on us, or feeling tempted by, let's admit that it's a real challenge.-----

And yet, we're not threatened with death for resisting are we?-----

Even if we Christians may be rejected by our friends, or colleagues, removed from our job, being burnt to death isn't threatened.

So remembering Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego's lives are on the line, let's return to the text and consider **our brief second point, the Response**.----

From **v8(SLIDE)** we see the Chaldean wise men maliciously accuse the Jews for not bowing down.-----

We're not told it's because they were anti-Jewish; it could be they're jealous, or don't want them to get away with flouting the law.

And like in ch2, King Neb responds with rage and a short fuse, **v13**.-----

At least he gives the three men a hearing and another chance.

But notice his arrogance – **v15** – 'who is the god' (or what god) will be able to deliver you out of my hands'.-----

And notice how the three Jews respond – with the splendid and famous words in v17-18.---

The original language here is Aramaic, very similar to Hebrew, and **v17** is difficult.

But I think the ESV is better at this point(**SLIDE**):

'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.'

In other words, Our God is able to, powerful enough to rescue us, and we believe he will.

How they knew that I do not know.-----

But then they continue, Even if he does not 'we will not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up'.

They refuse to disobey the first 2 of the 10 Commandments.

They are not focused on themselves.

They're willing to give up their lives for their Lord.-----

This is bold civil disobedience to the law.

It reminds me of Peter and the apostles in **Acts ch5** being told by the authorities to stop speaking about Jesus, and they reply,

'We must obey God rather than men'.-----

And what are the Results of this?-----Point 3(SLIDE)

Firstly we see Nebuchadnezzar's response.

Kids, I wonder what face you could give for Neb's face changing, when he's filled with anger, v19?----- Give me a super-angry face!

And with his typical pagan dictator **over-kill** Neb orders the fire heated 7 times hotter.

Not twice as hot, 7 times hotter.-----

And some of his strongest soldiers must throw the 3 men into the fire – he wants no chance of them escaping.-----

And what's the result for the 3 men of God?-----

While the strong soldiers get killed, not even the clothes of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego get burnt.-----

One thing my wife Kirsti doesn't really like about **camping**, is how the smell of smoke gets into all your clothes. But not for these guys.

And I know how hairs can burn in a fire, I have hairy arms and legs.

But for these guys, no hair singed, **v27**, not even the smell of fire on them.

Talk about complete and total protection.-----

How did this result come about?-----

Because, as King Neb saw, **v25**, in the fire with the men, was a 4th man, (**SLIDE**) one who appeared like 'a son of the gods'.-----

It was likely God's angel, as Neb says in **v28**, sent to rescue them.

But it's also possible it was THE preincarnate Son of God, present with them.-----
 And theologically we can say God was in the midst of them, with them in the fire.
 Just like he's promised to us followers of Jesus, with whatever we go through.-----
 Jesus said, 'I will be with you to the very end of the age' (**Matt 28.20**).

Never will I leave you never or abandon you – **Hebrews 13**

Ps 23(SLIDE) – Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for you are **with me**.-----

What great promises you and I can cling to, and rely on, when we go through suffering, walk through the fire, or face death.-----

Like Shadrach Meshach and Abednego, trust God.-----

The great Nebuchadnezzar dared God to rescue them from his grip, and he did.

God's power in this miracle mocks Nebuchadnezzar and his plans.-----

And what's the **final result** and response from Nebuchadnezzar?

V28, he praises Shadrach Meshach and Abednego's God.

For they trusted in him and 'risked their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God'.-----

Neb praises the true and living God, declaring no other god is able to rescue like this.-----

At the end of the chapter, it's funny that the 3 Jews get promoted for disobeying the King and he is still responding with over-the-top threats.-----

V29 is a bit like bludgeoning people to believe in Christ, but it'll never result in heart change.-

But ch4 shows us that God's not done with Nebuchadnezzar, and it's his heart that still needs to change.-----

And as we think about our **4th and final R, the Response for us;(SLIDE)**

it is our hearts I want to engage.-----

What would your response be, if you were in Shadrach's shoes?-----

Would you, by God's grace, be willing to be cast into the flames, over worshipping an idol?---

Would you be willing to be killed for Christ?-----

I ask, brothers and sisters, would Neb in v28 be able say that about you?

You trust in God, and are willing to risk 'your life rather than serve or worship any God except your own'?-----

Now I know this all seems so foreign, so far removed from us.

None of us are facing death for following Jesus. But people have.-----

In 1555, in Queen Mary Tudor's effort to restore England to Roman Catholicism, she burnt Hugh **Latimer**, the Protestant bishop at the stake(**SLIDE**) for his beliefs.-----

His famous last words were to his friend Ridley were, 'we shall this day light such a candle in England, as I hope, by God's grace, shall never be put out'.-----

In 2009 **Asia Bibi** was told to bring water to fellow workers in a field in Pakistan. They declined saying that it was contaminated because she was a Christian.(**SLIDE**)

They pressured her to convert to Islam, and annoyed and provoked, she said she did not believe Muhammad was a true prophet.

For that remark she got dragged away by a mob, was arrested, charged with blasphemy, and sentenced to death.

They said, change your faith and you will be freed.

Two Pakistani politicians were later killed for supporting her.

She spent 10 years in prison, but was eventually released and escaped to Canada.

Asia refused to deny Christ.-----

She was released.---- But many have died.

Hebrews 11 speaks to this situation when it gives the rollcall of people of faith, and at the end the writer mentions those who (**SLIDE**)

³⁴ quenched the raging of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, gained strength in weakness, became mighty in battle, and put foreign armies to flight. ³⁵ Women received their dead,

raised to life again. Other people were tortured, not accepting release, so that they might gain a better resurrection.

(SLIDE) ³⁶ Others experienced mockings and scourgings, as well as bonds and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned,^[1] they were sawed in two, they died by the sword, they wandered about in sheepskins, in goatskins, destitute, afflicted, and mistreated. ³⁸ The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and on mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground.

(SLIDE) ³⁹ All these were approved through their faith, but they did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰ since God had provided something better for us, so that they would not be made perfect without us.-----

Notice that, in the past some have been saved from death and the flames, others were imprisoned, tortured, and died, but all were looking fwd to a better resurrection. Through their faith, their trust in God, they all died waiting for and looking-fwd-to the new-creation resurrection God has promised.-----

Jesus died and rose again to defeat sin and death, didn't he?

Jesus by his resurrection, opens the door for our resurrection.----

If we trust in him he's defeated spiritual death for us, so we won't face eternal death, and don't need to fear judgment.-----

Because of our faith in Jesus we have forgiveness now, friendship with God now, and look fwd to life forever with God in the future.-----

The promise that God is with us now, and of abundant blessing in the life to come, means Christians can face prison and suffering and death, with hope.-----

We should pray for those around the world enduring horrible persecution.-----

Will you pray for them, in Pakistan, Nigeria, North Korea and more?-----

Whether you're a student at school, or an adult, in Australia we aren't facing torture, prison or death, for our faith in Jesus as Lord.

But we do face persecution of a lesser kind.

The word 'persecute' means to be pursued, and maybe you know what it's like to have people come after you, because you hold to or speak the truth of God's word.

Or you may know what it's like to be mocked (v36), mistreated (v37);----

or to be pressured and tempted to give up and give in, n' worship the idols everyone else lives for.-----

This passage has made me ask, am I willing to endure mistreatment, abuse; or the loss of respect, acceptance, or a friendship for Christ?-----

Recent law changes in Victoria have made me ask, am I willing to go to prison for speaking the truth about marriage, or gender, or morality, or Jesus being the only way?-----

By the grace of God, we can do that, because we know where our hope lies.-----

Trusting in the God who rules over all, and in the certain hope of resurrection, helps us **resist idolatry now.**-----

Our God who rules over all, and is worthy of our worship, our hearts, our all.-----

In 2015 **Dr Paul Church,**(**SLIDE**) who'd been a respected urologist in Boston Massachusetts for 30 years, lost his job.

His crime was to resist pressure to participate in Gay Pride events, and speak about the health risks of a homosexual lifestyle.-----

Would you be willing to lose your job because you worship Christ above all?-----

God wants us to show gay, lesbian and transgender people the same love and respect as all human beings. That matters to me.

But as McAlpine says in **Being the Bad Guys**, even if you love and respect your colleagues, work and treat people with integrity, and seek their blessing, when you decide it's time to take a stand or speak up it may have consequences.

You may lose your job, your influence, your status. You may even lose friends and the approval of your family, no matter how lovingly you explain yourself.

Teachers are pushed to promote sexual diversity in the classroom.

Doctors, mental-health professionals and now, anyone, even parents, are instructed that

affirmation is the only legitimate response to young people seeking gender transition.-----

It's hard to honour God in a hostile workplace and culture.-----

So when you Christian feel the pressure, or temptation to give in, to stay silent, go with the flow, or worship an idol, what can you do?-----

How do we become people who worship God and not our idols?

Tim Keller in his book, **King's Cross** says,(**SLIDE**)

Christians are free to take or leave money, power, recognition, and status. How?-----

These things at the top of the kingdom of this world, don't have to control them in the same way anymore.

When you understand what Jesus has done for you, it frees you.-----

The answer is not, You do better, You do more.

Idols need to be replaced, displaced.-----

They are not suppressed, they are eclipsed, by a greater desire.-----

Reflect on the cross, the death and victorious resurrection of our Lord Jesus,
and you will see the glory of God in the face of Christ.

And our lives will be reoriented around this vision, like the planets are around the sun.-----

Money, work, sex, status are no longer blazing at the centre of all things, Jesus is.-----

If career and success is a big idol for you such that you overwork and envy, and feel unrecognised, nothing good happens to you.

Remember something good has happened to you.

Jesus groaned in agony for you on the cross.

That's the greatest news your soul will ever hear.-----

Maybe you've saying, I don't want to speak up about my Christian beliefs to my work colleague;

Or as a nurse I don't want to say why I won't be involved in that abortion;

as a student or worker I want to stay quiet about why I won't attend the Rainbow celebration.-----

Sometimes it's wise to be quiet, and other times to speak up.

Pray for wisdom in that.-----

But when you're asked a question, be honest, and speak the truth in love.-----

And when you're obligated to disobey God, worship a counterfeit god, or the new religion of sexual identity, make a stand.-----

Sometimes your worship of the Lord will cost you.-----

Let's be inspired by the example of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who trusted God and said, The God we serve can rescue us, but even if he does not, we will not serve your gods.

Follow their example.-----

Resist the worship of idols by going deeper into Jesus.-----

Let's pray.