

Roland Burrows: 1 November 2020

(Sermon Summary)

Stand Firm: Daniel 3

The passage tells how Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's golden image. They are thrown into the fiery furnace but God delivers them, leading Nebuchadnezzar to acknowledge the true God.

The three young men had been taken to Babylon with Daniel and were being trained in the ways of the Babylonians, so that they could serve as administrators in the Babylonian empire. Evil regimes throughout history have sought to indoctrinate their people; recent examples are the Hitler Youth and re-education programmes in China. There are worrying signs of this in our own nation. Those who fail to comply are persecuted. From the days of the early church Christians have died for their faith; Polycarp, for example, was martyred in his eighties because he refused to burn a pinch of incense to the Emperor.

God is always there, though unseen and "within the shadows", watching over his people. Scripture is full of examples of God's deliverance, for example the Exodus; the fall of Jericho; Elijah and the prophets of Baal. Of course, the greatest victory of all is Christ's death at Calvary where all the forces of evil were defeated.

Athanasius and Martin Luther seemed to stand alone against the world. We should not worry about being in the minority: with God, one person is a majority.

The proportions of Nebuchadnezzar's image are those of a distorted human figure. Godless people often create ugly and distorted things which reflect the ugliness of their hearts, like Ceaucescu's palace in Romania, or contemporary art and music which lacks beauty and harmony.

The image was made of gold - probably the gold that the Babylonians had taken from the temple in Jerusalem. Ungodliness causes a degeneration in anything that it touches. Like this gold, things in society that started off good can be debased.

Nebuchadnezzar had conquered many different nations and was trying to bring them all together in a unified culture. We see this happening today.

We do not know exactly what the statue represented - whether Nebuchadnezzar or a god. Perhaps this indistinctiveness was deliberate so that the different peoples could all view it as their own god.

The different musical instruments are individually listed four times. It could be that this is because they are taken from different cultures and would not normally be played together. Nebuchadnezzar's event was exciting, new and progressive - something that many would want to be part of. And of course, behind it there was the threat of the fiery furnace.

Daniel is probably not present here because he had been promoted to a higher position and would not have been required to take part.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego could have taken the view that taking a stand would make little difference - why not go along with this small thing and live, so as to have more opportunities for influence in the future? But these men stood - perhaps an even greater miracle than their survival in the furnace. Because this tiny minority stood fast, they had a profound effect on history. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are among those listed in Hebrews 11. They were among those who subdued kingdoms. It is possible that Nebuchadnezzar was actually converted at this point. "Stand therefore" and you will do great things.

"You will not get leave to steal quietly into Heaven in Christ's company without conflict or a cross" (Samuel Rutherford). But in Christ we shall be more than conquerors. Like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, we have to go against the popular mood and opinion of the day, and stand on our own.

Nebuchadnezzar's fury, and the betrayal of those who reported them, were all part of the trial. Nebuchadnezzar had already heard from Daniel about the true and living God, but his heart was hardened. In the furnace, the three men endured because Christ was with them - and whatever our trial, He is with us. The fire burned away their bonds: sometimes trials can liberate us, quicken us in prayer, bring us to study Scripture. The chains of self-centredness, arrogance and pride are burned off in the furnace.

The lesson is to stand fast in the strength that God gives. This will have an impact on others.

Spurgeon said that "If you yield an inch, you're beaten. But if you will not yield, they will respect you ... You can't shake the world if you let the world shake you." May we look to the Lord to help us stand, knowing that we will be victorious in His name.