

Sermon – 05/08/2007 pm

Kingdom Conflict

Study Text: Daniel 3:1-18

After the death of Eli the people of Israel became corrupt. The Philistines defeated them and captured the ark of the Lord. They put it in the temple with Dagon and their other gods (1 Samuel 5). The next morning they found Dagon flat on its face before the ark of the Lord. They set Dagon up again and the next morning it was flat on its face again with its head and hands broken off.

The Philistines realised the God of Israel is not like other gods. He will not take a place alongside other gods. After sending the ark of the Lord to other Philistine cities, and seeing people suffer and die, they decided to send it back to Israel. They feared the ark of the Lord for the hand of God was heavy upon them.

Daniel and his friends worshipped the God of Israel. They were in a foreign land where people worshipped other gods, gods of wood and stone. Even the king of this land was regarded as a god. Sooner or later there was going to be conflict. The king of Babylon would come face to face as it were with the King of heaven.

Who is the god who will deliver you from my hands said Nebuchadnezzar as he raged against Daniel's friends (3:15). They would inevitably be caught up in this confrontation of kingdoms. The outcome of this conflict was never in doubt but for these young men life was on the frontline would not be easy. Would they find faith to follow God or would they falter in the face of a raging king. Was the path of compromise an option for them?

Glory Taken By Man

Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold 27m high. He set it up on the plain near Babylon. A few thousand years before on this same plain in the land of Shinar men started to build a tower whose top is in the heavens (Genesis 11, Daniel 1:2). 'Let us make a name for ourselves' they said. The Lord came down and confused their language and the building stopped.

When sin entered the world the heart of man was corrupted and it has been so ever since. He continues to exalt himself against God. He continues to take glory to himself rather than giving the glory to God (Romans 1:21). And God continues to put men in their place. He allows them to self-destruct, but they destroy many in doing so.

Nebuchadnezzar was troubled by a dream which Daniel, in the power of God, revealed to him. He was most impressed and praised the God of Daniel. 'His sinful heart had been shaken but not renewed. The truth was that instead of having a new heart he had the same old heart – now a little more hardened as his blatant blasphemy on the plain of Dura demonstrated'.

What led Nebuchadnezzar to build this statue we are not told. Some say the idea came from his dream. He was defiantly building a man who would not fall. He was not the first to build a monument to match his ego, and will not be the last.

Not long ago on TV we watched an enormous statue of Saddam Hussein being torn down as his kingdom came to an abrupt end. This was yet again on the plain of Shinar, but it is not just in this place that men exalt themselves against God. It happens in every nation, in every city and in every home. It is in our fallen nature to proclaim ourself king and seek after praise and glory.

At Nebuchadnezzar's command officials were called from all the provinces to pay homage to his image. The nation, indeed *all people, nations and languages* came to a standstill on the day of dedication for his image (3:4, 7). You may note the similarity between this formula and that in Revelation 10:11, 11:9). All people without exception were commanded not only to honour the king but to worship him as god.

'An intriguing feature of the arrangements made for the statue unveiling is that it was shrouded in a religious atmosphere'. The orchestra was on hand to lead the people in worship. This was an essential part of worshipping this image. When the music played the people fell down in worship – idol worship.

Nebuchadnezzar had already shown his maniacal tendency by killing his wise men when they could not tell him his dream. He was a man drunk with power. He was given to anger and ruthless violence. If anyone refused to worship his image they were to be cast into a burning fiery furnace (3:6). As we will see this furnace was like a giant chimney, fuelled through a door at the base and open at the top. Roasting people alive was not uncommon in the ancient world.

Gloating 'Gophers'

Certain Chaldeans came forward and accused the Jews (3:8). Power hungry king always attract discontents These Chaldeans were probably jealous that these Jews, specifically Shadrach, Meshach and Abde-Nego, had been promoted ahead of them in the public service. It is surprising that Daniel is not mentioned here. Maybe they did not target Daniel because he was a bit too close to the king.

The Chaldeans noticed that the Jews did not fall down and worship the gold image when the orchestra played. You will notice the phrase 'horn, flute, harp, lyre and psaltery in symphony' being repeated a lot. Repetition is a feature of the original language. Some translations have 'bagpipes' or just 'pipes' where the NKJV has 'in symphony'.

Pagans and polytheists had no qualms about worshipping the image of gold. Expediency, not truth, was their motto. They would do anything to keep their jobs, and in this case keep their heads. They went along with the king on his ego trip. They were even prepared to set their colleagues up for a fiery death.

'We were just following orders'. 'We were just doing what everyone else was going'. 'I am not going to put my head up to get it cut off'. Have you heard such words spoken? Have you said such things yourself? Saddam Hussein's soldiers tried to excuse themselves with such words. Many try to excuse their corrupt behaviour with such reasoning. 'Everyone tells lies, everyone takes bribes, everyone lives together before marriage, everyone gambles, everyone drinks'. Is this not the way many think today? They are just like the Chaldeans, men and women who will sell their soul to the devil just to make life a bit easier for the moment.

The thing that Chaldeans and the like hate most, are people who take a stand upon some principle, especially a religious principle. Shadrach, Meshach and Abde-Nego were diligent servants of the

king. They could not be accused of wrongdoing in their work. They *submitted themselves to every ordinance of men for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme or to governors* (I Peter 2:13f). They were hated by the Chaldeans who *agreed to speak lying corrupt words* to the king (2:9).

The Chaldeans conspired against these young Jews, reporting to the king that they were disloyal to him as king and that they did not worship his gods (3:12). Actually they were most loyal to the king, but to worship his false gods was a different matter. Shadrach, Meshach and Abde-Nego discerned the difference even if men blind to the truth of God did not. They would suffer from the arrogance and ignorance of unbelievers.

Glory to God

Shadrach, Meshach and Abde-Nego feared God, not men. Under the covenant that God had made with them were divine commands which they were bound to obey. There was no 'opt out' clause in these commands; no 'if I agree' clause; no 'if it is expedient' clause. The Chaldeans followed their own laws. 'We will worship the gold image today if this pleases the king; tomorrow we will worship some other god if we feel like it'. This vast difference in belief led to a vast difference in response to idol worship. Do we see such differences in our society? If not, why not? We do not have idols did you say? Take another look!

'You shall have no other gods besides me'. 'You shall not make any carved images; you shall not bow down to them nor worship them'. These two commands headed the ten that the Lord gave through Moses. Shadrach, Meshach and Abde-Nego knew these commands but would they obey them? Would they obey them in the face of death? '*Who is the god who will deliver you from my hands*' the king roared? 'Who will deliver you from the flames?' What would these young men do? Would they *stand in this evil day*? (Ephesians 6:13). Will you stand in this evil day? How is your faith?

The words of these young Jews to the king are amazing. They stand out from the page as a great peak of doctrine and faith. Their faith was not blind faith. They were not prepared to die for something that **might** be true. They were not prepared to die for a god they had made themselves. They had no doubt that the God who gave the commands was sovereign over the whole earth. They had no doubt as to his omnipotence. *Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the fiery furnace, and he will deliver us from your hands O king* (3:17).

Whether God would deliver them through life or death was not theirs to know. They did not presume to know the secret counsels of God. They knew only what God had spoken and they believed what he had spoken. They trusted God's promise never to leave them or forsake them. With Job they would say *though he slay me yet will I trust him* (Job 13:15). And with the apostle Paul they would have said *for me to live is Christ and to die is gain* (Philippians 1:21).

Do you comprehend and marvel at the great faith of these three young men? Where do you stand? Where do you stand in relation to the promises of God? *Put on the whole armour of God that you may be able to stand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand* (Ephesians 6:13).

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