

Daniel 2:46-3:30

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[0 : 00] Seeking the Lord's blessing then. Let's turn to the portion of Scripture we read. Daniel chapter 3 and at verse 25.

Luke, he answered, I see four men, loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt, and the fall of the fourth is like the Son of God.

Daniel is one of the great figures of the Old Testament, a prophet of God, an ambassador of God to his own people, and a witness of God to the Babylonians.

He is the author and principal, the character of this book, and the book covers the period of the Babylonian captivity.

When the people of God were exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon, we always have to bear in mind why that happened.

[1 : 19] And it happened because of Israel's sin. Israel's sin. Israel's idolatry.

Israel's rejection of God. The God of Israel. The God of the covenant. And they rejected God. And God chastised them.

And they were exiled to Babylon. And they find themselves in Babylon. And here is this young man who was taken from Jerusalem, from Judea, when he was about 16 years of age.

And the narrative of this particular book begins with Daniel and his three friends. His three friends. Shadrach, Mishach, and Abed-Nigo.

Names that were given to them. Names that were given to them. By this chief of the universe.

[2 : 31] As part of the indoctrination and the brainwashing almost. that they were to be under.

As they were faced with this training. This three years training. And I'll come back to that a little bit later. And chapter 1 and verse 7.

To them the chief of the universe gave names. He gave Daniel the name. Belteshazzar. To Hananiah, Shadrach. To Mishael, Mishach. And to Azariah, Abed-Nigo.

The first three chapters, of course, are dedicated specifically to Daniel and to his three friends.

Daniel, of course, as you know, rose very soon to a position of prominence because of the spirit of God that was with him. And the way God, in his sovereignty, enabled Daniel to interpret the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar.

[3 : 41] And, of course, in doing that, that created many difficulties for Daniel. And some of those difficulties we can read about in this book.

And in particular, that chapter 6. When the Chaldeans plotted against Daniel. Just as they plotted here. Against Shadrach, Mishach, and Abed-Nigo.

Plotting the downfall. But God delivered Daniel. And God delivered Shadrach, Mishach, and Abed-Nigo.

And Daniel, throughout this whole narrative, and throughout this whole book, and throughout this whole history, retains his integrity.

And he retains his loyalty to the God of his fathers. He was given a remarkable insight into things that are difficult to understand.

[4 : 42] And this book contains many things that are difficult for us to understand. There were things that were even difficult for Daniel to understand himself.

In the last chapter of the book, we read these things. Things that he says. He says this.

And he said, Although I heard, verse 8, Although I heard Mrs. Daniel speaking, I did not understand. Then I said, My Lord, what shall be the end of these things?

And of course, Michael the archangel speaks to him, and he says to him, Go your way, Daniel, for the words have closed up and sealed till the time of the end.

And of course, this book ends with that most marvelous verse, where it says, But you, go your way till the end, for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days.

[5 : 49] The remarkable reality of the promise of eternal life to Daniel. The promise of resurrection. Resurrection.

And so, in this great book, we see certain themes appearing. There is very much, as I said, this theme of deliverance, and the great deliverer.

In it, of course, when we look at the deliverer, we see Christ. We see Christ. This book points us to Christ in a very real way.

Christ is, in chapter 2, and verses 34, and 35, and 44, the great stone. The great stone that is going to crush the kingdoms of this world.

Again, Christ is pictured for us in the chapter we're going to read, and in particular, that remarkable vision that Nebuchadnezzar saw.

[7 : 03] The remarkable vision that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego saw. They saw it in different ways, but we'll come back to that. We see Christ again as the Son of Man who was given dominion by the Ancient of Days in chapter 7, verses 13 and 14.

Chapter 9 speaks very clearly about the coming of the Messiah and the promise that the Messiah would be cut off, but not for himself. Not for himself.

Who for then? For sinners like us. It's a direct prophecy of Calvary and the reality of Calvary in Christ's experience.

He went to Calvary to save his people from their sins, to save sinners like us. And most certainly, too, he is the divine messenger in chapter 10.

And you can look at these things for yourselves. The other things that appear here are also obvious to us and that is there is a real conflict here between Jerusalem and Babylon.

[8 : 22] representing true and false worship. It is almost a mirror image of what is going on in the world now. As it was going on then, it's going on now.

True and false worship. A world in opposition to God. A world that despises the true worship of the God of Israel.

That despises the God of the Bible. There is a theme running through here as you can see, a theme of the persecution of the people of God.

And as we know, as you see so often in the scriptures, fanning the flames of persecution is the devil. The devil who is so persistent.

He's like a dog with a bone. There's a dogged persistence about the devil. And if you're a Christian, you will know something about this. You will know something about this.

- [9 : 26] Constantly attacking you and constantly weighing you out. And constantly trying to grip you up. And constantly attacking your weaknesses.
- He knows us very well and he knows our weaknesses. I was relaying just in the car coming over about a story I heard from my brother very recently about a woman who saw the good in everybody.
- And she was known for this. She just would not see anything wrong with anybody. It didn't matter who they were. Saw the good in everybody.
- And somebody said to her one day, and of course it was told in Gaelic, so I'll tell you Gaelic, first before I to relate in English. This man said to her, Hawthichthyn ma' as a ghulatunni.
- Chani'n catechitit o' ma' as a geobolherin. I was told, is she sure? Well, can we sure the harm? Chani'n adish to you.
- [10 : 33] So chani'n adish. I, the man said to her, I would almost think that he would find some good in the devil himself. To which she responded, I will say this fellow, he's not lazy.
- And he's not lazy. But we should be on our guard. On our guard constantly. And in, now to this narrative, the narrative following the interpretation of the dreams and the promotion of Daniel and the promotion of Shadrach, Misha and Abednego, we join this narrative.
- And the narrative in chapter 2 and verse 46 starts in such a remarkable way. Following the interpretation of the dream, here is King Leibach Nexer, the most powerful man in the world.
- The most powerful man in the world, surely, at this time, in the history of the world. And what is he doing in verse 46?
- He fell on his face prostrate before Daniel. He was on his knees worshipping Daniel.
- [11 : 55] And the narrative is so remarkable because the narrative that follows revolves around Nebuchadnezzar building this great, massive statue.
- And it seems as if the statue was of himself. So that all would bow down and worship him. He wanted to impose a state-imposed religion on the people and on the people of God, the Jews that were brought from Judea and from Jerusalem to Babylon.
- He wants everybody to worship him and to fall down before him.
- And he makes this image of gold, of gold. And of course the image in itself is a symbolic representation of Babylon and of pagan worship.
- And Babylon of course in the scripture symbolises the bondage just as the people of God were in bondage in Babylon, so it represents for us in the scriptures the bondage that we are in by nature to sin and to Satan.
- [13 : 22] And to Satan. In his dreams, in the expression of his dreams in chapter 2 and verse 38 when the dream was being made, was being interpreted to him, you read this in verse 38 about this, this is the dream.
- Now we will tell the interpretation before the king, you, O king, are a king of kings, for the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength and glory. And of course, God has.
- God has. The words of, the words of Jesus are so pertinent here. When he says, when he says to Pilate, you would have no authority, were it not given to you from heaven.
- The authority of the kingdom that Nebuchadnezzar had, was given to him in the sovereignty of God. In the sovereignty of God.
- And Daniel tells him this, and he says, and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beast of the field, and the birds of heaven, he has given them into your hand, and has made you a rule over them all.

[14 : 42] You are this head of gold. You are this head of gold.

And of course, very shortly after this, he begins, and they begin to build this statue of gold, of gold, to honour himself, and to honour the pagan gods.

And they want to build it in the plain of Judah, which according to the records is a flat plain, a flat plain, and it's specifically there so that everybody could gather, and they could all see it.

It's like a natural amphitheatre. A natural amphitheatre. So as many as possible could see it, and as many as possible could bow down and worship.

And then the decree goes out, there's to be a great dedication ceremony, every official in the land, civil, judicial, military, and so on, from all over this vast empire, they are called to this great spectacle, this great spectacle.

[15 : 59] For the music plays, they must all bow down and worship the image, but be cast into the flames. The threat is a powerful deterrent.

The threat is a powerful deterrent. and in the history of the people of God, many threats have been used as a deterrent.

But praise be to God that in the history of the church, there were non-conformists, there were Protestants.

You know, the word Protestant has an old-day generation, it's almost a bad word, it has certain connotations. but it's a beautiful word, in the light of the scriptures, in the light of God's cause, it's a beautiful word, it's a refusal to bow down and worship the idol and the idols.

But the threat is such a deterrent, who wouldn't come from? well, here are three men. It's as if in this narrative, Daniel was somewhere else, but here are these three men who refuse to bow down.

[17 : 28] They're spotted by the Chaldeans, and you can see them, they're the agents of the devil, just as they were in the, in Daniel's experience, when they tried to plot against down him and down him, was thrown into the lion's den.

Certain Jews, these cuddling and say, certain Jews that you've promoted, but oh king, they, they are not paying you due regard, following this great decree that you wish you.

Their jealousy is a dangerous, dangerous thing. It's as that they're saying to them, look at us, we've remained loyal to you, but these three men have not.

The remarkable thing is that there were thousands and thousands of Jews in Babylon and all we hear is of three men who don't bow to the idol.

And in his rage and fury he summoned them and they give in verses 16 to 18, they give their response to Nebuchadnezzar.

[18 : 48] A response of faith. A response of faith. They refused to deny God.

They refused to put the creature before the creator. And they say to Nebuchadnezzar, our God is greater than you, Nebuchadnezzar, and he is greater than the fiery furnace.

Great faith. Great faith. And the remarkable thing in verse 18, they say, well, we know that God will deliver us, but if he doesn't, let it be known to you, king, that we do not serve your God's.

God will worship the gold image which you have set up. Remarkable faith, strong faith, an immovable faith.

They were only sinners, of course. Job had an immovable faith. Though he slay me, the word literally means murdered, though he slay me, yet will I trust him.

[20 : 02] And just as the Chaldeans were used here as the devil's agents. So, as one commentator puts it, so was Job's wife used as an agent of the devil.

Job, she said to him, curse God and live. Never. Never. Never.

Never. Shadrach and Meshach and Abednego stand for him. Stand for him. The furnace is heated seven times more than usual.

They're cast into the fire. The fire is so hot that even these guards were consumed. Who bound them? It shows you how little Nebuchadnezzar thought of a human life.

The fire that was appointed to destroy Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego destroyed his own people. And then from verse 24 onwards you have this dramatic scene.

[21 : 08] The drama unfolds. There is Nebuchadnezzar sitting there looking in whatever construction was of this furnace. He could see into it.

And suddenly he jumps up on his feet and says Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?

Through walking I see four men loose. He was utterly astonished and one is like the son of God.

So the narrative in a sense speaks for itself. the question is how does it speak to you and to me? Most of us don't live under that tyranny.

We can't go back there. We don't know what it's like. And praise the God that we don't live under that kind of tyranny. But the same principle applies.

[22 : 18] And the same principle exists. the world wants us to conform and to bow down.

All kinds of pressure are applied to us in every day of our lives. Moral, political, in the workplace, the pressure to be like the world, the pressure to follow the fashions and fads of the world, the pressure to do what everybody else is doing.

We will just follow the next person. It's remarkable how mankind can almost line up and people follow each other in a line with it.

They're asking why and what are we doing? There can be pressure even in our own homes. And the people of God can experience many types of affliction, many furnaces of affliction.

But Shadrach, Meshach, and Elnigo knew what was going on. They knew what was going on. Chapter 1 tells us that. They rejected the king's delicacies, the king's meat, which they were offered every day.

[23 : 44] They were to be trained for three years in the language and the culture of Babylon. They were to be indoctrinated so that they would become like the Babylonians. But what does the Bible say?

It says this, but Daniel purposed in his heart, chapter 1 and verse 8, but Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies.

that with the wine which drank, Daniel and his three friends purposed in their heart.

What does that mean? It means that they're resolved to remain faithful to God no matter the cost. One of the first books that I bought when I was converted was Dare to Be Adapha.

A commentary on Daniel dare to be Adapha. It's more applicable to me today than it was then.

[24 : 57] Because every day we have to stand, we have to purpose in our heart, and we have to resolve to be faithful to God.

Only three here who did not bow down. Where were the rest of the multitude? Where were they? these men had the courage of their convictions not to yield, not to yield.

There's a little rhyme that is quite good and quite good for us to learn. It's this yield not to temptation for yielding is sin.

Each victory will help you some other to win. I was reading just early this morning about an article by one of the great preachers in the church, the Reverend Moody Stewart, and he was talking about habit, habit, the danger of habit, the danger of habitual sin, and how every, every time you yield, it's a spiralling downwards.

It gets more difficult if you yield every time to that temptation and so the yielding becomes habitual and it's extremely dangerous.

[26 : 35] I think in that narrative that he's relaying is he's relaying about the Duke of Wellington and it was the Duke of Wellington that said habit, is ten times nature.

Habit is ten times nature, the force of it, the power of it, it's a powerful thing. This kind of persecution is nothing new in the church.

The history of the scriptures tell us that. The disciples, the apostles, threatened and persecuted. All around them they were living in fear.

There was bloodshed. There were all kinds of atrocities going on in the early church and there has to be throughout the history of the church.

The Reverend Richard Cameron, who was the Lion of the Covenant, the Lion of the Covenant, had his head and his hands cut off because he stood for him.

[27 : 45] He was a nonconformist. He refused to bow down to the idol. Refused, rejected it. He was killed in the Battle of Erds. Mos, killed, and his hands and his head cut off and his soldiers who were with him, I think one of the men who were with him were his brothers, or a brother anyway.

They were hung, the men who were taken. He was killed in the battle but the other men were taken and they were hung in Edinburgh. And they put his head and his hands in a sack and they took him to his father.

And they said to his father, do you know that? Do you know this head and his hands? Oh, he said, yes, I know that. They are my sons, my dear sons.

But it is the Lord, it is the good will of the Lord who would neither have me nor mine, but who has made goodness and mercy to follow me all the days of my life.

It's still going on. It's still going on. It's still going on. Terrible persecution of the people of God because they believe in Christ.

[29 : 13] They believe in Christ and Christ will deliver them. Our service, our service must be the whole person, body and soul.

Body and soul. The same principle applies here as Paul speaks of in his letter to the Romans. I open the Gaelic Bible.

Romans 12 and chapter 1. Therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, give you the cut as living sacrifice, as holy, acceptable to God, which is your reason of ourselves.

that's what Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did. The same principle, the same spirit. They were saying, if he doesn't deliver us, we will not serve you.

It doesn't matter what happens to us. To die is gain. Gain. The spiritual principle is this, we must obey God rather than men.

[30 : 25] Providence can come like a fire to consume us. But they were kept from the fire. How were they kept? They were kept because God kept them.

He was with them in the fire. That is the remarkable thing about this narrative. He was with them in the fire. Who was with them? The angel of God's presence.

The angel of the covenant. the second person of the trinity. This is one of the great revelations of Christ in the Old Testament.

The verses in Isaiah 63, verse 9 resound in all their affliction. He was afflicted and the angel of his presence saved them.

He is with us in our trials. He is with us in the fiery trial. Come upon us.

[31 : 30] We sang in Psalm 23, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, what does it say? I will fear no evil, for you are with me.

You are with me. You are with me every step of the way. That's what the Lord Jesus Christ does for us. He is with us every step of the way.

We lost one of our elders this week, a lovely, lovely man, and the text that I was reminded of was this, what God said to the people of Israel on the wilderness journey.

He said to them, my presence shall go with you and I will give you rest. My presence shall go with you and I will give you rest. And the people of God, though the road may be rough, they will find their rest ultimately in heaven, in heaven.

Christ is with us in our trials. By his spirit, he knows what it's like to go through the fire. He went through it himself. the trials and the fires of rejection and mockery and hatred and physical abuse from Roman soldiers and from Jews.

[32 : 55] And he went through the fires of Calvary, of Calvary for you and me. Bear your wrath, the wrath of God against sin.

He bore it all, the wrath of God against all of sin. He bore it. What a cry, what fire, and what fury.

He is with us in the fire even when we can't see him. Did Shadrach, Mishach, and Abenigo see him? Yes, but they saw him by faith, by faith.

It is remarkable that God revealed this to Nebuchadnezzar, but perhaps we have to understand that there's a back story here in the life of Nebuchadnezzar that God was working in his life, in his life.

There's another great lesson for us in this narrative and it's this. that the fire consumed the bonds that were binding Shadrach, Mishach, and Abenigo, but it didn't touch them.

[34 : 22] It didn't touch their persons. It didn't touch them in any way, what, so ever. And that remarkable narrative at the end of the chapter.

The fire had no power on their bodies, nor the hair, nor were their garments affected, not even the smell of fire. Not even the smell of fire.

The fire dealt with their bonds. And that's what God does. God does. He deals with our bondage.

When He comes in power, in saving power, He deals with our bondage, our bondage to Babylon, the symbol of the bondage to sin and Satan.

He deals with us. And He deals with us through the great deliverer. The great deliverer, the Lord Jesus Christ, time and time again, the Scriptures speak of setting the prisoners free, entained as we are in the bondage of sin and Satan.

[35 : 44] He sets the prisoners free. Moses persevered. He endured.

How did he endure? By faith. By faith. As seeing Him who was invisible. He saw Him with the eye of faith.

Not with his natural eyes, but with the eye of faith. What is the essence of faith in the great Gresham Mitzche?

What is the essence of faith? Sometimes it's hard to get your head around it, to grab off it. What is faith? What is it? Mitzche's book on faith is remarkable.

And in it says this, the essence of faith is to receive, to receive, not to do.

[36 : 44] but it is always followed by a life in which great things are done. Christ is the only one who can continually lose us from the things that find us.

And the Lord knows that in our wilderness journeys, there are things that come into our providence. there are other things that we bring upon ourselves.

The New Testament is full of warnings for us on many things, among which are this, the lusts of the eye, the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life.

And they can bind you. They can bind you. They can hold you. And they can constrain you. And it's a horrible feeling.

Until we come to the blood, the blood, until we come to the deliverer, the only one who can loose these things that cause us to weep, that cause us to question whether we're saved in the first place, that causes us to question, do I have faith?

[38 : 07] What have I got? When I'm down in the depths and I'm questioning and I'm looking this way and that way, only Christ can loose the bonds.

And in the remarkable providence of God, he appoints trials and tests, for us. I'm always intrigued by the narrative of God, the children of Israel going through the wilderness.

We know why they went through the wilderness because they didn't listen to the report, the good report. And God chastised them and rebuked them. And they went 40 years, journeying through the wilderness.

wilderness. And Moses says to them, fear not for God is come to prove you that his fear may be before your faces that you sin not.

to Deuteronomy age too. And thou shalt remember all the ways of the Lord thy God led these 40 years in the wilderness, to humble thee and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments or not.

[39 : 34] The going is tough for times. The road is rough, you can be assailed from all sides, with all sorts of temptations.

But what do the scriptures say? They are not heard. It's a remarkable narrative.

And they are not heard, in the middle of verse 25. And they are not heard. The only thing that's burning is that the fire of God's trials brings.

The only thing that it burns is sin. One of the commentators made this comment. There was gold, but not on the statue, but in the hearts.

of these believers in Shavrach, Meshach, and Abed people. The great promise of Isaiah 43 and verse 2, that though they go through the fires, the fire, nor the waters, will overcome them.

[40 : 54] And the Lord knows that we need these experiences. We need these experiences. And we have to accept these experiences as God's appointments.

things. But we should always be encouraged by the testimony of the word of God and the testimony of the people of God.

In the great chapter of faith, we read these words in Hebrews 11, 32 to 35. And what more shall I say?

For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson, and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel the prophets, who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouth of lions, quenched the violence of fire, skipped the edge of the sword, that a weakness remained strong, became valiant and bad, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

By faith quenched the violence of fire. Though God is a consuming fire, he is still a consuming fire.

[42 : 18] And the scriptures tell us about a fire that will not be quenched. What fire is that? Well, it's the fire of hell, the fire of a lost eternity.

If you continue to reject Jesus, it must be delivered, it must be made seen yet. The scriptures tell us that the fires of hell cannot be quenched, quenched.

I pray that it will put the fear of God in all of us, in all of us, but it's especially those of you who are still rejecting Christ.

I see one, a fourth who is like the Son of God. Oh, may we come to know Christ in our own experiences.

And tonight we're going to talk a little bit more about the purpose of these experiences of persecution of fires. And we see, and I hope we see, by God's grace, the purposes of it all, and the wonder of it all.

[43 : 40] Amen.