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Life in Babylon / Faith; Fortitude; Pluralism; Suffering; Idolatry; Deliverance; Pain / Daniel 3:1-30

In Daniel 3:1-30, we learn how God calls believers to deal with pluralism and pain.

Introduction

The Book of Daniel is about Daniel. You may recall that Daniel was deported from Jerusalem to Babylon when he was about fifteen years old. Three friends were exiled to Babylon with Daniel, along with thousands of other Jewish leaders.

Daniel and his three friends spent the rest of their lives living and working in Babylon. They were the top students in the top educational institution in Babylon. They were given work in the government where they rose to senior positions.

The king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, was extremely shrewd. He took just the leaders from Jerusalem and made them live and work in Babylon because he wanted them to assimilate into Babylonian culture. He believed that after a generation or two, the Jews would give up their faith and become “Babylonianized.”

Daniel is helpful to us because he teaches us as believers how to live in an increasingly secular world. Daniel answers the following question: “How do I live as a believer in the Biblical God in an unbelieving world?”

The text that we are going to look at today deals with two very important issues that we face as believers.

One issue has to do with the pressure of pluralism. We see that in the first part of the text that deals with the golden image.

And the second issue has to do with the presence of pain. We see that in the second part of the text that deals with the fiery furnace.

Scripture

Let us read [Daniel 3:1-30](#):

¹ King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. ² Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. ³ Then the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. ⁴ And the herald proclaimed aloud, “You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, ⁵ that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. ⁶ And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace.” ⁷ Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, all the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

⁸ Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews. ⁹ They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, “O king, live forever! ¹⁰ You, O king, have made a decree, that every man who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image. ¹¹ And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace. ¹² There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, pay no attention to you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

¹³ Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king. ¹⁴ Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, “Is it true, O Shadrach,

Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? ¹⁵ Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?”

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

¹⁹ Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated. ²⁰ And he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. ²¹ Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace. ²² Because the king’s order was urgent and the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. ²³ And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace.

²⁴ Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, “Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?” They answered and said to the king, “True, O king.” ²⁵ He answered and said, “But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods.”

²⁶ Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace; he declared, “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here!” Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. ²⁷ And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king’s counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed,

their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them.²⁸ Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king’s command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God.²⁹ Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way.”³⁰ Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

Lesson

In [Daniel 3:1-30](#), we learn how God calls believers to deal with pluralism and pain.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. God Calls Believers to Deal with the Pressure of Pluralism (3:1-18)
2. God Calls Believers to Deal with the Presence of Pain (3:13-30)

I. God Calls Believers to Deal with the Pressure of Pluralism (3:1-18)

First, God calls believers to deal with the pressure of pluralism.

King Nebuchadnezzar made a golden image that was ninety feet tall. He set it up in a public place and arranged for an orchestra to play. He also ordered all his leading officials to come to the dedication of the golden image.

The people were told that whenever they heard the orchestra playing music, they were to fall down and worship the golden image. If people did not fall down and worship the golden image, they were to be cast into a burning fiery furnace.

Then some Chaldeans reported the following to King Nebuchadnezzar about Daniel’s three friends, “There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These

men, O king, pay no attention to you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up” ([Daniel 3:12](#)).

Nebuchadnezzar was furious when he heard this. He had Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego brought to him. He asked if it was true that they did not worship the golden image. He said that when the music played, they were to worship the golden image and all would be well and good.

“But,” he said, “if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?” ([Daniel 3:15](#)).

What we have here is very interesting.

Babylon was a pluralistic city. It was a multinational and multiethnic city. There were people from all kinds of backgrounds. Importantly, the different people worshiped their own gods. Babylon was like many cities in our Western world today.

Here is what Nebuchadnezzar wanted from all people, including Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: “I am not asking you to give up your god. You can worship your god. What I am asking is that you worship the golden image in *addition* to your gods. In private, you can worship your god. But in public, you must worship the golden image.”

Do you see that?

All pluralistic cultures do this. You cannot make exclusive claims that your religion is right and everyone else is wrong. When you are in public, you have to agree with everyone else.

In our culture today, the great golden idol that all people are called upon to worship is the gender movement in general and transgenderism in particular.

The orchestra burst into music in 2015 with the Obergefell decision that approved same-sex marriage. Since that time, the music has been playing louder and louder. All people are being coerced into agreeing that you can love whomever you want and that you can call yourself by any one of 57 so-called genders.

Our political leaders want you to know that you can believe whatever you want in private. But in public, you must support the cultural revolution.

How did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego respond to the pressure of pluralism?

King Nebuchadnezzar demanded that the three men give up their private belief and capitulate to public pressure.

Here is how they responded in [Daniel 3:16-18](#):

¹⁶ “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

Their unwavering faith in God enabled them to resist the pressure of pluralism.

I want you to see something very important in their faith. They refused to bow to the golden image. They believed that God would deliver them. However, they said, that even if God did not spare their lives, they still refused to bow to pluralism.

These men did not have faith in God for what they could get out of that relationship. They had faith in God simply because of who God is. That is very important. Let me illustrate the difference.

Sometimes people will say, “I believed in God. I prayed about a really important thing in my life. But God did not come through for me. I thought that if I obeyed God, God would answer my prayer. But he did not.”

What is happening is that when a person says this, that person is not trusting in God *alone*. He is trusting in God to fulfill his agenda. He wants God to meet his need. He is trusting in God *plus* something. And that, dear friends, is not trusting in God.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were trusting in God alone. They knew that God *could* deliver them. But they did not know whether God *would* deliver them. They knew that God could rescue them *from* death. But they also knew that for believers God always rescues *through* death.

That is why people get so bitter at God when he doesn't do what they want him to do. God doesn't heal a loved one. God doesn't provide a need. God doesn't shield us from pain. So, the problem must be with God when in fact the problem was that they did not trust in God alone but they trusted in God *plus* their own agenda.

Some of you are facing—or soon will—the loss of a job because you are called to capitulate to the pressure of pluralism.

Let me encourage you to deal with the pressure of pluralism by trusting wholeheartedly in God alone.

II. God Calls Believers to Deal with the Presence of Pain (3:13-4:3)

And second, God calls believers to deal with the presence of pain.

[Daniel 3:19](#) states, “Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated.” He had the three friends thrown into the furnace, which was so hot that it killed the men who threw Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the furnace.

Nebuchadnezzar went to a safe place to see the furnace. He was shocked by what he saw.

He said in [Daniel 3:25](#), “But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods.”

Later, Nebuchadnezzar called Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to come out of the furnace. And they did! Verse 27 states that “the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them.”

So, what do we learn from this narrative?

In the Bible, furnaces are often a metaphor for pain and suffering and trials and trouble.

Therefore, we learn three truths about pain from this text.

A. Pain Is Inevitable

First, pain is inevitable.

Everyone experiences pain and trouble and suffering in this life. That is a fact of life. It is often hard for Americans to comprehend that fact.

Of all the nations on earth, it seems to me that Americans struggle the most with pain and suffering. All other people around the world understand that pain is inevitable. However, Americans think, “I have lived a good life, and I should not be experiencing pain or suffering.”

But that is just not true, is it?

For example, [Job 5:7](#) states, “... but man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.”

And [1 Peter 4:12](#) puts it even more pointedly, “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.”

Think of Jesus. Jesus lived a perfect life. And yet, he experienced horrific pain in his life.

So, first, you must recognize that pain is inevitable in this life.

B. Pain Is a Test

Second, pain is a test.

[1 Peter 1:6-7](#) states, “In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

Do you see what Peter is saying? He is saying that your faith is tested to see how genuine it is when you experience pain and trials and suffering. Just like gold is revealed by fire, so genuine faith is revealed by a test. And that test is pain.

Pain is a tough test.

Some people fail that test. Pain comes into their lives and they get disappointed because God did not do what they wanted. And so they abandon faith in God.

But the genuine believer passes the pain test. He knows that God will strengthen his faith as he goes through pain. He holds on to the truth of [Isaiah 43:1b-3a](#), where God says,

“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.”

So, pain is a test to reveal the genuineness of your faith.

C. Pain Can Be Bearable

And third, pain can be bearable.

What happened in the fiery furnace?

God did deliver Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Nebuchadnezzar himself tells us what happened in [Daniel 3:28](#),

“Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king’s command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God.”

God’s angel was with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fire. And who was this angel?

In the Old Testament, the angel of the Lord was often a pre-incarnate manifestation of Jesus. It was Jesus himself who walked with the friends in the fiery furnace. Jesus protected the friends. Jesus preserved their lives. Jesus enabled them to escape the fiery furnace unscathed.

So, how can we bear pain in this life?

We remember that Jesus went into the ultimate furnace in our place. He came to this earth and lived and died and experienced the wrath of God in our place.

So, when we encounter pain in this life, we remember that Jesus enables us to stand in the furnace of our lesser pain because of the greater pain he experienced in our place. We realize that our pain is minor in comparison to the pain that Jesus endured for us. We look to Jesus and draw strength from him when we go through pain.

Conclusion

Biblical faith is cultivated through trust and obedience, often during great trials.

The truest test of your faith is when God's answer is *No*. When there is no deliverance. When there is no healing. When you are called to bow down to the golden image of the cultural revolution. When you lose your job. When your loved one never recovers.

And all the while you have been doing what is right. You are honestly trying to live a life that honors God.

You don't have to be a Christian very long before you will find yourself in a tough situation. And even though you pour out your heart to God in prayer, the heavens remain silent. God's answer is *No*.

That is the greatest test. Is your faith still in God when the answer is *No*? When there is no miracle?

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego said, "But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up" ([Daniel 3:18](#)).

One of the early church fathers, John Chrysostom, lived in the late 4th and early 5th century. One day he was brought before the emperor and commanded to renounce Christ.

The emperor threatened him saying that if he would not renounce Christ he would be banished from the country forever—he would be separated from his father's land for the rest of his life.

John responded, “You cannot. The whole world is my Father’s land. You cannot banish me.”

The emperor then said, “Then I will take away all of your property and treasures.”

John replied, “You cannot, for all my true treasures are in heaven.”

The emperor then said, “I will send you to a place of absolute solitude where there is not one friend for you to talk to.”

John said, “You cannot, for I have a friend that is closer than a brother to me. He is my elder brother, Jesus Christ, who has promised to be with me always—to the very end of the age.”

In anger, the emperor then said, “I will then take your life.”

John said, “You cannot. For my life is forever hidden in Christ with God.”

Chrysostom was of the same spirit as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

May it be that you and I are of the same spirit as Chrysostom, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego too. Amen.