

## DANIEL: When God Meets You in the Fire Daniel 3<sup>i</sup>

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Good morning, Trinity! For those of you that are guests, we want to say a special welcome to you. My name is Chris Wigley, and I serve as one of the Pastors here at Trinity. And whether you are in the room or you are joining us online, we are excited to have you today. And on behalf of our church family, and our staff team, we say welcome you today.

We would love the opportunity to connect with you. You can simply text the keyword, "TBCMP," that stands for Trinity Baptist Church Mt. Pleasant, to the number 94-000. When you do that, you will be sent a reply text that will have a link you can click on. That will direct you to a form that will then provide us with basic contact information to follow up with you. Again, we would love the opportunity to connect with you and to pray for you.

We are in the middle of a teaching series working our way through the Old Testament book of Daniel. We have looked at the juxtapositions between culture and the life God has called us to live, how we can live with conviction, and last week how to focus on the True Kingdom of God. The main idea behind this series is to see how Daniel influenced and ungodly culture.

So, I want to invite you to turn with me in your copy of God's Word to Daniel chapter 3 this morning. If you're new to bible study, and it's okay if you are because we are all new to bible study at some point, Daniel is located in the Old Testament between the books of Ezekiel and Hosea. If you do not have a bible with you this morning, there is a bible located on the seat rack in front of you. If you need a bible, feel free to take that as a gift to you today. For the vast majority of those bibles, Daniel is located on page 620.

Daniel 3 contains one of the most famous stories in the bible. It was my favorite when I was growing up. Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego and the fiery furnace. If you're a Veggie Tales person, it is the story of Rack, Shack, and Benny.

### **OPENING ILLUSTRSTION: Dr. Phil Show**

Years and years ago Cathy and I went on a trip to Los Angeles, just the two of us. I had worked out getting us tickets to the Dr. Phil Show. Now, this is not an

endorsement or an indictment of Dr. Phil. We just happened to be able to get tickets and thought it would be fun to be a part of taping a show.

Well, we arrive at the studio, and we are numbers 86 and 87 in line. We were told that about 200 people get in for the taping. So, we felt confident that it would all work out.

And the way it worked is that we were then taken into a room where a producer gave us an update as to what all had transpired up to that day's taping. Airing the show is done at a later date. After the producer filled us in, they said that they would first seat VIPs and special guests, then it would be first come first serve after that.

Well, the producer calls my name as the 5<sup>th</sup> person in the VIP and special guest category. I turn to Cathy in shock, and she gives me this look like, we better not be on the show. She was thinking this was my way of doing marriage counseling or something.

They take us to our seats, ON THE FRONT ROW! Center. Cathy is freaking out. Another producer comes out once everyone gets to their seats and tell us that there was something like 30 cameras in the room. And he warned us not to pick our nose or anything like that but to act, quote, "normal."

Now, I don't know if you've ever been placed in a situation like that, but once you are told that there are 30 cameras in the room, pointing at you, you act anything but normal. Know what I mean?! But add to that, sitting on the front row, of a national television talk show! The only thing going through my mind is don't do anything stupid! There is this enormous pressure to perform.

So, when the show aired, like 13 weeks later, we gathered around the TV, told our friends and family, and we wanted to see if we made it on national television. We popped a tape in the VCR, that's how long ago this was, and recorded it in case we were on TV. Well, lo and behold, we were on TV, front and center. Cathy looked beautiful as usual. Me, not so much.

There was a moment when Dr. Phil said some sort of goofy joke, and the camera then cut to me, my national television debut. Now remember, I'm feeling the pressure to perform here. So, when he said that goofy joke, I made a laughing face that looked something like this... [goofy face]. Y'all, that was

on national television, and now on VHS. Good news it you won't be able to play it even if we were to find it. No more VHS players.

The reason I share that with you, other than to humiliate myself, is to point out that we all, in some way or another, deal with the pressure to perform. Whether it is in our job, peer pressure at school, or in your national television debut, we are all familiar with the pressure to perform.

In our study this morning Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are faced with a pressure cooker situation. Let me set the stage for us a little bit.

### **RECAP:**

In 605 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar invades Jerusalem and takes it captive. They then pick the best and the brightest young men to be trained in Babylonian ways. Daniel and his friends resolved not to defile themselves and instead live according to their convictions. But God came through and they were proven to be 10 times better than everyone else.

Then, Nebuchadnezzar has a dream that terrified him. None of his wisemen could tell him the dream and interpret it. But God gave Daniel that information and he came through clutch and spared everyone's lives. As a result, Nebuchadnezzar promoted Daniel and declared that Daniel's God is the God of gods and Lord of kings, a revealer of mysteries. That's the close of chapter 2.

Now as we turn our attention to Daniel, chapter 3, most scholars believe that 17<sup>ii</sup> years pass between the close of chapter 2 and the opening of chapter 3. That's important information for a couple of reasons. First, we know that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are now in their mid-30s. The second reason that is important to know is that 17 years is the time by which Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges God and then defies God. Turning away from God is often a slow fade and while 17 years is indicative of a slow fade, it is also not that much time to depart in such a radical way. The moral of the story for us is that it doesn't take much and it doesn't take long to drift away from The Lord, does it?

This morning, I want us to see an overarching theme in Daniel 3 and at the same time work through the components of that theme. The theme is, in times of increasing perversion and times of increasing pressure, God provides His presence. That's the theme of this chapter, and our outline this morning.

### **MESSAGE:**

So, let's first, let's look at in...

#### **1) Times of increasing perversion...**

Daniel and company have a great victory when he is able to know and interpret the king's dream. But it was all downhill from there. Read with me, Daniel 3, verses 1-7. *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. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>And **the herald proclaimed** aloud, "You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, <sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a **burning fiery furnace**." <sup>7</sup>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.*

Now, there's a lot in this passage. Let's break down a few things. First, the statue. It is an image of gold. Most scholars believe that this was in direct response to the interpretation of the dream Nebuchadnezzar had in chapter 2. Remember what he saw? A statue of a man with Gold, Silver, Bronze, Iron and Clay. Remember what the gold stood for? It represented Nebuchadnezzar and the kingdom of Babylon. So, where did he get the idea for a statue? From his dream. Why was plated in gold? That stood for Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar is saying, "I reject the prophecy of God and I am going to establish my kingdom forever." This man went from praising God to defying Him. In just 17 years.

Next, the detail of the statue draws our attention to the statement the king is trying to make. 9 stories tall and 9 feet wide. It is set out on the plain of Dura. The idea is that it can be seen from a long way away.

We also see the detail regarding the dedication of this statue. This is a national holiday type of a thing. The king, of course, is there, also the satraps, prefects, governors, counselors, treasurers, justices, magistrates, and officials. To give you a comparison, satraps are equivalent to princes, prefects are like our governors, counselors like assistant governors, treasurers just like what we would think, justices equivalent to our judges, magistrates would be our police, and officials refers to other local dignitaries.<sup>iii</sup> The point is, this dedication is a big deal kind of celebration.

But the question that immediately comes to mind is, “Where is Daniel?” When you read this chapter, you don’t read about Daniel. Certainly, if he was there, he would have taken the same stand as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So, we are left to assume that Daniel isn’t there. But he was promoted to be a dignitary, why wouldn’t he be there? Well, most scholars believe that he was purposefully left behind so that there would be representation of the kingdom while all the other dignitaries were at the dedication.<sup>iv</sup> That would explain his absence from the dedication.

Now, I want you to see the increasing perversion going on here. Understand what perversion is when I say that. The Oxford Dictionary defines perversion as, “a distortion or corruption of what was first intended.”<sup>v</sup> The Bible lays before us, clearly, what God first intended. And ever since the fall of man, God’s original design has been perverted. As one commentator I read this week pointed out, Nebuchadnezzar is trying his hardest to create a counterfeit kingdom, perverted worship.<sup>vi</sup> Follow me here.

A herald proclaims, in other words, a counterfeit preacher, verse 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.” Music from the instruments being a counterfeit worship service. The Golden image being a counterfeit God. He further pointed out that the furnace is a counterfeit Hell. What is the penalty of not worshipping the counterfeit god? Burning in the furnace.

Listen, beloved, we find ourselves in a very similar time of increasing perversion, a corruption of what God intended. We see the perversion of what brings true joy and happiness, the perversion of where identity is rooted, the perversion of marriage, the perversion of sexuality, the perversion of the image

of God, the perversion of character, the perversion of the Gospel, and even the perversion of truth. And I’m not trying to speak ill here, you understand. We should expect a non-believing world to act like non-believers.

**But if Daniel teaches us anything, it speaks that in times of increasing perversion, followers of Jesus have an opportunity, a stage, to demonstrate the power of God.** That is the encouragement we gain here.

So, we see times of increasing perversion. Secondly, we see in...

## 2) Times of increasing pressure.

If you determine to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit in times of increasing perversion, you will experience times of increasing pressure. Read with me beginning in verse 8 of Daniel 3. *<sup>8</sup> Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews.* [Jealousy and racism.] *<sup>9</sup> They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, “O king, live forever! <sup>10</sup> You, O king, have made a decree... [skip down to verse 11] <sup>11</sup> And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace. <sup>12</sup> There are certain Jews whom you have appointed* [you see the accusation they are making against the king. The Jews you appointed.] *over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, pay no attention to you... [Skip down to verse 13]. <sup>13</sup> Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king. <sup>14</sup> 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? <sup>15</sup> Now if you are ready when you hear the sound... 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.* [I don’t know what caused the king to want to give them a second chance, but these young men of conviction chose not to take him up on it. He goes on...] *And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?” [The king says. In other words, your God can’t save you now.] <sup>16</sup> Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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.” [I’ll come back to this in a minute]. <sup>19</sup> 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**. [Increased pressure to conform]. <sup>20</sup> And he ordered some of the mighty men of his army [even more pressure] to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace.*

The pressure to conform here must have been immense. Can you imagine? I try to put myself in the sandals of these young men. In addition to external pressure to conform (the furnace), there had to be internal pressure to justify conforming. I'm sure they thought, "The king has been pretty good to us. He's given us good jobs. Maybe we should just show appreciation by bowing." Or they could have thought, "It's not really idolatry if we don't mean it in our heart." Or they could have even said, "What good is it if we die? I mean, at least if we are alive, we can influence the culture." You see the pressure, right?!

Listen, we find ourselves in similar circumstances. There is increasing pressure to conform and, I don't know about you, but there is pressure to justify even biblical convictions. I feel it, don't you?

### **ILLUSTRATION: Examples of Pressure**

Let me give you a couple examples where I see the pressure mounting in our day and time. Many of the historic theological Christian doctrines we hold dear are being called narrow-minded and intolerant. And in our cancel culture you can be banished from holding firmly to those biblical convictions. What about in academia? In universities all across our country, students are looked down on as ignorant if their worldview aligns with Scripture. What about friendships? I have known of folks that have lost friends because of the perception that biblical convictions are hateful. When all you are trying to do is love people, they reject that love and instead call you a hater.

This is turning up the heat. These are examples of feeling the pressure to conform. But, if we are honest, in good 'ole East Texas, we don't face the

gravity of the consequences of increasing pressure like the rest of the world. I read an article how terrorist groups abducted 17 girls, killed many Christians and burned down 2 churches last week. All because of their faith in Jesus.

And I think we would be ignorant if we didn't think that might come to visit us in the future. Just ask our neighbors to the north of us in Canada. I was on a conference call with a group of pastors recently and a couple are pastoring in Canada. Did you know that new federal legislation now makes it illegal, under the threat of arrest, to provide biblical counsel to anyone struggling with same-sex attraction, even if the person want the counsel? Turning up the heat.

But beloved, **again, if the book of Daniel provides any comfort, any encouragement, it is that in times of increasing perversion and increasing pressure, God gives His followers a platform for ministry in powerful ways.** And that leads me to my third point today. In times of increasing perversion and increasing pressure...

### **3) God provides His Presence.**

God meets His people in the fire. Amen? Read with me beginning in verse 24.

*<sup>24</sup> 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." <sup>25</sup> 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." <sup>26</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> 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.*

*<sup>28</sup> 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.*

*<sup>29</sup> 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.”<sup>30</sup> Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.*

What took place blew Nebuchadnezzar away! God came through. But I want you to realize something here. Very important. These men still had to walk through the fire. In fact, according to verses 25 and 26, they stayed in the fire until Nebuchadnezzar called them out of it. See, God didn't prevent the fire, He leveraged the fire.

The reason this is important for us to understand is that I think sometimes we hold onto this belief that if we just pray, or are good enough, or do all the right things, our life will be spared of the fire. But that's not what Scripture teaches. That's not what these three men believed and experienced. Jesus endured pain and suffering, as did the apostles. See, the power in Daniel 3 is not that they were spared of the fire, but that God delivered them in and through it.

I want to point your attention back to verses 17 and 18. These men said, *<sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> **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.* You know, the phrase, “He will deliver us,” most scholars believe is better translated from the original language as, “He may deliver us.”<sup>vii</sup> So their actual statement to Nebuchadnezzar was, “God is able, He may, or may not, but if He doesn't, we still remain unmoved.” That's faith.

I think it is important at this point to ask, “What is the ‘but if not,’ in your life?” Something you are praying desperately for, or wish was entirely different. Is it a medical condition? A relationship? A financial burden? A testing of your faith? Listen, the God whom we serve is indeed able to deliver us, ns He may deliver us, or He may not, but even if not, we know He is present with us. And that truth gave these young men the resolve to face any pressure.

Did you know there was actually benefit to these men going through the fire? A couple benefits. First, their ability to endure and trust God in the fire gave them a testimony that otherwise would have not been possible. Secondly, the only thing the fire consumed was what bound them.

You know, sometimes it takes a fire, a storm, in our lives to live unbound us. There are many things that take us captive. Addiction, certain beliefs, friends,

hurts, and life experiences can cause our faith to be bound, hindered. But when God sees us through fire moments in our lives, we learn to trust him and walk freely, even in the fire. Verse 25 of Daniel 3. King Nebuchadnezzar says, ***“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.”***

When the king ascribes the appearance of the fourth person in the fire, he didn't have the benefit of the New Testament. But he knew that the fourth person in the fire was the Son of God, the true God. “The fourth person in the furnace was Jesus Christ in one of His preincarnate appearances in the Old Testament.”<sup>viii</sup>

While God does not promise us that our lives will be spared of the fire, He does promise to be with us. Psalm 23:4 says, ***“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, [why?] for you are with me...”***

### **CONCLUSION:**

I don't know what fire you are walking through today, but I do know that God wants to meet you the fire. He may not spare you of it, but He will provide His presence. And as the band comes, I want us to prepare to respond this morning.

Perhaps you're here today and you're walking through something. It's tough. I want you to know that God is present. And one of the ways God provides His presence is through His church. We want to come alongside you and join you in the fire by praying with you and over you. Our elders will be here at the front and happy to receive you.

Maybe you're here this morning and what you need to hear is that by placing your faith and trust in Jesus as Lord, you can be spared of the eternal fire of Hell. Scripture teaches that, ***“the wages of sin is death** [eternal death in a real place call Hell], **but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*** Those that have placed their faith and trust in Jesus as the Lord of their life will be spared of the eternal fire of Hell. If you haven't trusted Jesus as Lord, or if you have questions about whether or not you've done that, you come and let's nail it down today.

I'm going to pray. We're going to sing. And I'm asking you to respond to the prompting of The Lord on your heart this morning.

## ENDNOTES:

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<sup>i</sup> Works consulted in preparation of this message: Travis Agnew, “Daniel [Series Overview]”, article published on [travisagnew.org](http://travisagnew.org) on August 13, 2020; Stephen R. Miller, *The New American Commentary: Daniel*, B&H Publishing, Nashville, 1994; Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Resolute: OT Commentary on Daniel*, David C Cook Publishing, 2000; J.A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, Peeters Publishing, 1928; Julius Oppert, *Expédition scientifique en Mésopotamie*, 1859. Precept Austin, “Daniel 1 Commentary,” article written May 19, 2020, accessed at: [https://www.preceptaustin.org/daniel\\_1\\_commentary](https://www.preceptaustin.org/daniel_1_commentary), January 13, 2022; Troy Rackliffe, “Daniel part 4,” preached at Glade Community Church in Daniels, WV, September 2020; Mark Driscoll, “Kingdom Down #3: Find Jesus in your Fiery Furnace” accessed at: <https://realfaith.com/sermon-series/kingdom-down/> January 25, 2022; Skip Heitzig, “I Dare You: Stand Up!,” taught at Calvary Church Albuquerque on Sunday, January 27, 2013.

<sup>ii</sup> Wiersbe suggests 20 years between the chapters. Driscoll and Heitzig lean more toward 16 years. So, realistically it is between 15 and 20 years from the close of chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3.

<sup>iii</sup> Stephen R. Miller, *The New American Commentary: Daniel*, pages 111-112.

<sup>iv</sup> *Ibid.*, page 108.

<sup>v</sup> Oxford Dictionary definition found on Google search.

<sup>vi</sup> Mark Driscoll, “Kingdom Down #3: Find Jesus in your Fiery Furnace” accessed at: <https://realfaith.com/sermon-series/kingdom-down/> January 25, 2022.

<sup>vii</sup> Stephen R. Miller, *The New American Commentary: Daniel*, page 119.

<sup>viii</sup> Quote taken from Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Resolute: OT Commentary on Daniel*, page 55.