

CLASH OF KINGDOMS

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF DANIEL

Daniel chapter 3 (Sermon from Sunday 10 July, Justin Tamlin)

1. Information

a) Read the passage, perhaps twice using two different versions

b) Fill in any info that didn't make it into the sermon.

For your reference, Justin divided the chapter into three parts:

1. The Coercion of Conformity
2. The Courage of Conviction
3. The Closeness of Christ

Consult the training manual after the sermon to see what additional information on chapter 3 you can highlight.

c) Answer any questions the group might have

2. Activation

Justin made particular points of application for each of the three sections of his sermon. These 'Activation' questions include further scripture references for discussion, as well as particular questions that would be helpful to discuss as a group

a) Coercion of Conformity

- i. What are all the pressures facing S, M, A that were coercing them to bow the knee to an idol?
 - Authority (v.1-7) - Nebuchadnezzar, the King is repeated 6 times in the first section, but only twice in the rest of the chapter - almost to emphasise the King's authority
 - Conformity - all the officials gathered (v.2-3), they are commanded (v.4-5), and threatened (v.6). All the peoples, nations, languages fell down and worshipped (v.7) There is tremendous coercion from the crowd
 - Malice (v.8-12) - the astrologers motives weren't pure; they cast everything as though these Jews were failing to honour the king. This wasn't entirely true. They could have been easily tempted to spend time defending their actions.
 - Intimidation (v.13-15) - there is something very challenging about a monarch's rage and the prospect of dying for seeking to honour God.

- ii. What was Nebuchadnezzar doing by building this statue of gold?
 - Making a statement that his kingdom would not be toppled
 - Trying to reverse the outcome of the dream in chapter 2
 - Using this act of worship as a loyalty check / vote of confidence from his subjects
- iii. The Hebrew word for "set up" appears 11 times in Daniel chapter 3. Find those instances and compare them with:
 - Daniel 2:21 *"He changes times and seasons; he deposes kings and raises [sets up] up others"*
 - Daniel 2:39 *"After you, another kingdom will arise [be set up], inferior to yours"*
 - Daniel 2:44 *"The God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure [be set up] forever"*
- iv. What do we learn about the clash of kingdoms by comparing the repetition of "set up" about Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 3 in contrast with "set up" in chapter 2 about God?
- v. What are some ways in which people seek to set up their kingdoms in opposition to God?
- vi. How is our society similar to what S, M, A faced in Babylon?
 - What are the challenges/opportunities of living in a religiously pluralistic society?
 - In what ways are you coerced to conform to the world?
 - What are some ways we can stand out but in a respectful way?

b) Courage of Conviction

- i. What were the risks / implications for Nebuchadnezzar by the young men refusing to bow down?
 - Challenge to his personal authority (his ego)
 - Challenge to the politics of the day
 - Challenge to the religion of the day (the gods may bring bad luck to Nebuchadnezzar as a result of their defiance)
- ii. What is Nebuchadnezzar implying by saying: "Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?"
- iii. v.16-18 an incredible statement of faith by these young men. How does their answer reveal a biblical theology of suffering?
 - The young men express trust in two attributes of God: 1. knowing that God is powerful (able to rescue) and 2. knowing that God is wise (may choose not to).
- iv. How do we tend to emphasise one over the other instead of keeping them in tension (balance):
 - If we emphasise "God is able" then we presume to know God's mind; we are seeking to control God; suffering will crush us if God doesn't rescue us
 - If we emphasise "God is wise" and forget "He is able" then we believe that dictators, rulers, people are more powerful than God; we fear man; we are failing to trust God for the impossible - lacking in faith
- v. Do you think it's possible to know what your convictions are without being tested by fire?
- vi. What are the 'statues' in our day the demand our obedience?

c) Closeness of Christ

- i. Nebuchadnezzar is a polytheist (believes in many gods) so how does he interpret the 4th figure in the fire?
- ii. Commentators are divided about whether this 4th figure is an angel / messenger (Gabriel) or Christ himself in a pre-incarnate state - a Christophany. This cannot be resolved from the text, but in either case God has sent his personal emissary to pass through the fire with them. This comes to full fruition in the New Testament when God comes to dwell with us (Emmanuel - God with us!). Why do you think this is the way God chooses to reveal his nearness rather than putting the flames out or stopping Neb?
- iii. We sometimes think that if we are obedient God and do the right thing God will make the pressure go away, but often it increases. What is the beauty of this miracle for Christians today?
 - God doesn't always save us from the fire, but He is with us in the fire!
- iv. What are some of the ironies in this account?
 - Nebuchadnezzar is forced to recognise God's greatness instead of his own - he has to eat his words from earlier: "what god will be able to rescue you from my hand." Earthly rulers / dictators are not as all-powerful as they think they are!
 - Those who obeyed Nebuchadnezzar's command end up dying (the soldiers) and those (S, M, A) who refused to obey his command end up living
 - All the officials of the world are assembled not to bow before a man-made statue but to witness how the true & mighty God may act when people bow before Him
 - All the tribes, tongues & nations who were threatened if they didn't bow down are now threatened if they say anything against the God of the Jews.
- v. How does this account point to Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane being willing to step into the furnace of God's wrath on the cross?
 - Reflect: Jesus was forsaken and abandoned by His father in the fire so that you & I never have to be.

4. Implementation

- As usual, Implementation is the third step in interpretation:
 - i. What?
 - ii. So what?
 - iii. **Now what?**
- By now you know to **consolidate** what your group will do differently in the week to come, as well as being **accountable** for last week's 'Implementation'!
- **Justin also gave CG's a helpful prayer guide for this week:**
- Spend some time praying for:
 - Courage and boldness in the face of the pressure of conformity
 - The persecuted church would remain faithful (google: the "World Watch List" produced by Open Doors)
 - Tyrants & dictators - that they would see God and be humbled (e.g. Putin and the situation in Ukraine)