

Standing in the Plain of Dura 2



Daniel 3: 8-30

Open this morning to Daniel chapter 3. A couple of weeks ago, Kory took us through the first seven verses as he talked about standing in the plain of Dura. This morning, we want to finish this chapter as we continue our sermon series on the book of Daniel, standing in a fallen world. If you were here a couple of weeks ago, you know that our youth pastor, Kory, looked at those first seven verses and revealed to us what was behind the thinking of King Nebuchadnezzar and ultimately what's behind the thinking of Satan. As we begin with verse 8-30, we're going to see this passage from the perspective of the three Hebrew boys, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. We're not going to read all the verses because you know this story like the back of your hand. Yet, as Kory reminded us, there are some things that we may not be familiar with in this most familiar of stories. Beginning with verse 8, listen to what Daniel wrote.

Scripture

"Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews. They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever! 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. And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace. 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."

(Prayer)

Father, add Your blessings to the reading of this Your Word. In Your Son's name we pray, amen.

As we approach this passage this morning about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and the fiery furnace, I can't help but remember one of the first stories I ever heard about this passage as a young preacher. There was a man who was preaching this passage and he knew his congregation knew these three Hebrew men as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, but from the first chapter of Daniel, we learn their Hebrew names, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. He wanted to remind his congregation of their Hebrew names, not their Babylonian names. He had memorized those names, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, but like the congregation, he had been so used to talk about them as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that he made a cheat note. When he got to the point to say Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, he was afraid he might forget those names, so he made a little note card and wrote Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah and pinned it to the inside of his coat on the right side. He was just going to casually look down and say Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah and go right on preaching, but he opened the left side of his coat, and it said Hart, Shaffner, and Marx. This morning, we're talking about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, also known by their Hebrew names Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Neb has already made his gold image ninety feet tall and nine foot

wide. He has already made the decree at the sound of a certain song. Everyone is to bow down.

I would like to use my sanctified imagination this morning and put this story in a little more modern context, yet not violate any principles of the story at all. Scholars debate how much time has passed from Daniel 1 and 2 to Daniel 3. One scholar that I read actually believed twenty years of time has passed. However, most conservative scholars do not believe that. They believe only a couple of years have perhaps passed. If that is true, you remember when we met these boys, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, they were about sixteen years of age, so if we add two to four years to their age, they would be somewhere between eighteen and twenty years of age. They would not be what we would call youths anymore, they would not be boys; they would be what we call young men. It's just tough for us in our modern context for us to get the picture of a ninety-foot statue on the plain of Dura and at the sound of certain song, everyone bowing down tot that image. That's just bizarre. As basketball season kicks off, let's put it in that context. It's the beach ball classic. The Babylon Bombers are playing the Egyptian Pyramids, and they're in the finals. These young men happen to play for Babylon State. They're the Bombers. They're going up against their archenemy, the Pyramids from Egypt. Shadrach is starting point guard. Meshach is small forward. Abednego played all three positions, kind of like I did in school. He sat on the center of the bench, guarded the water bottles, and looked forward to the next game. I don't know what you're thinking, but if you're like me, you know that the retail businesses have picked up on this huge statue out on the plain of Dura, and now they're being retailed all over the Babylonian Empire. You can have your own personal statue of this image. I want you to get this picture. BNN has a live feed of this final game. Sports reporters from Babylon Today are in the gymnasium. Imagine for just a moment that we've got just a few seconds left in the game, the Bombers are down by one point, the Egyptian Pyramids are pressing, the ball comes in to the point guard, Shadrach, he dribbles down and gets it to half court, there are about five or six seconds in the game, he waits until just a couple of seconds, he penetrates the lane and Meshach playing small forward, breaks toward the basket. Meshach's guy picks up Shadrach, the defender

does not come over and with a second to go, Shadrach drops the ball off the Meshach, and Meshach lays the ball up. As he lays the ball up, the defender recovers, fouls him, the horn sounds, time's up, but we've got a foul. One point down, no seconds on the clock, two free throws, and Meshach is shooting, the small forward. Shadrach slaps his hands giving that ok sign you can do it. Abednego is over on the bench, the referee hands the ball to Meshach, and all of a sudden, the band, Babylon Bon Jovi, begins to play. Out of the rafters of the gymnasium drops a larger image of the golden image that everybody has in their pockets. As it falls to center court, five thousand people in the gymnasium of Babylon State University all fall down and bow, except Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

See, that's where life really happens, in the gymnasiums, in our school systems, in our places of employment, in our places of recreation, in our places of pleasure. That's where life happens. That's where we're tempted to bow down to the false images of popularity, success, prestige, pleasure, or whatever. In this world in which we live, as Kory reminded us, everyone is doing it. If everyone is doing it, it seems ok to do it. What enabled Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, really, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, to stand when everyone else was bowing down? It's not going to get any simpler than that from here on. But I believe the simplicity of these next four statements is the answer of how we stand in a fallen world. When I examine verse 8-30, there are some clues that the writer of Daniel gives us that paint the picture of who these three Hebrew men really were. Don't waste your time wondering where Daniel was and why he wasn't there. That's a waste of time. But see these three men who had Daniel, early in their life, as a mentor and a great discipler, now on their own and they do not bow down.

Here's what I believe we can learn from their life, and that's how not to bow down. Please, I want you, in your mind, to see the images you're tempted to bow down to. What you will be tempted to bow down to will not be a temptation to me, and what I will be tempted to bow down to will not be a temptation to you. Each one of us has temptations, a false god, so to speak, false things, false pursuits that Satan uses in our lives. He tells

us if we don't, we're really not living, and that's the consequence. You just really won't be alive if you don't get in on this. Look at verse 8.

1. Who They Were

At that time, Chaldeans stepped forward and maliciously accused the Jews. Right off the bat in verse 8, Daniel brings identity into this situation. We've now got Chaldeans maliciously accusing. These words, maliciously accused, are Hebrew words that mean to 'eat piece by piece.' Wow! It was a Babylonian idiom, so to speak, that corresponds with the English idiom we have to 'eat your lunch.' Did you ever have that bully at school who ate your lunch? That's the expression here. What the Chaldeans were trying to do was denounce, tear down, these Jews. But Daniel brings in identity. I want to tell you what I think is the first principle if we're going to stand to the temptations that we're asked to bow down to. That is this. In this passage, it was obvious the Chaldeans knew that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were not Chaldeans, they were not Babylonians; they were Jews. If the Chaldeans knew who Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were, Jews, do you not believe Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego also knew who they were? They were not Babylonians. They were not Chaldeans. They were Jews. Now, during the days of the monarchy, during the days of David, the children of Israel began to be referred to, not only as the children of Israel, but as the children of Judah, men of Judah. From that tribal word, Judah, talking about one of the twelve tribes of Israel, comes the term, Jew. We refer today to the nation of Israel as Jews. Do you know what the very name, Jew, means? It means 'praise of God.' If you remember, Leah named one of the sons of Jacob, Judah, meaning 'praise God.' During the days of David, the nation of Israel began to be referred to as Jews. In Jeremiah 34:6, Jeremiah is going to write where God is going to say to the nation of Israel to set all of your Hebrew slaves free, for they are your brother, a Jew. I want you to get this. The very name, Jew, means praise of God. Here's what I believe about these three boys with all of my heart. They knew they were Jews. As Jews, they knew that their very identity meant praise of God. I believe with all of my heart, the only way you and I are going to be able to stand in this world in which we are asked to bow down from time to time is if we really have a handle on who

we really are. The Bible speaks so much about identity, the New Testament speaks so much about identity, and even Hollywood even picks up on identity. Do you remember that movie, *Overboard*? It was about identity. Do you remember the movie, *The Lion King*? It was ultimately about identity. What do Mufasa finally remind Simba of? You are more than you have become. What does he tell him? Remember who you are. Steve Poole told me that just about every day of Steven's life when he would get on the school bus before he would go to school that Steve would tell Steven, "Remember today who you are." At all points in our life, we must remember who we are, and we are Christians. We're Christians by birth. The moment you turn from a life of sin and put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ, you became God's child. The term that describes who we are is Christians. This means we are followers of Christ. Guys listen, that can't be a default. That can't be something you fall back on. That's something you've got to know. That's got to be real to you. At all times in your life, you must be solid in your relationship with God, and that constitutes you as a follower of Christ and you bear the name Christ. That's who I am. Not only should we know it, but the world in which we live should know it. It didn't take those in the administrative cabinet of Nebuchadnezzar long to know these boys aren't like us. They are Jews.

2. They Knew Where They Were

I want to tell you what else they remembered. They remembered where they were. Daniel is going to weave in that when the Chaldeans come before Nebuchadnezzar, he's going to remind them that these men have been appointed by Nebuchadnezzar throughout the province of Babylon. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, I believe personally, not only knew who they were; they knew where they were. They were in Babylon. They were not home. They were not in Kansas anymore! When is it going to dawn on us where we really are? We are in a world that is very hostile to God. I think each one of us know beyond a shadow of a doubt that we are beginning to live in a time in which it is going to be very tough to be a Christian, even living in the greatest country on the face of the planet with all the freedoms we have. We are not the majority anymore. We are the minority. When sociologists

look at America, they call us post-modern. When they began to look at religion, they're beginning to acknowledge that we are becoming post-Christian. Christian values are no longer the number one influence in this country. Do you know where you are? Do you know that Jesus prayed before He actually left the planet for God not to take His children out of the world, but to keep them safe in the world? Then He said to God, they're not of the world and that's why the world is going to hate them. From Jesus Himself, we get this concept that we are in the world that's anti-God, but we are not of this present world system. That's why Paul would write to the Romans and say, when in Rome, do not do as the Romans do. I believe Paul got that from the book of Daniel. When in Babylon, do not do like the Babylonians do. Do not be conformed to this present world system that's trying to the best of its ability to squeeze you into its way of thinking! Many of us will bow down to images that we don't realize we're bowing down to if we don't realize where we really are. Guys, if this is the Bible belt of America, I would hate to see the rest of America. Please hear me.

3. They Knew Who They Served

We've got to know who we are, we've got to know where we are, and then thirdly, it's obvious that these three Hebrew men knew who they served. I want you to watch this. When they stand before King Neb and he asks if it's true. Now what he's doing is giving them a second chance. I want to say this to you. They would many times give us a second chance. When Neb gives them a second chance by saying is it true; they come back and say we don't even have to answer you on this. Can I just say this? I believe those boys had their mind made up that they were not going to bow down before they were ever faced with the temptation to bow down. I think what gets us in trouble most of the time is we wait until we get there and then decide what we do based on the situation. Many times, we sell out. You don't need to decide if you're going to bow or not; you need to already know you're going to stand for the moment even comes. Here's what enabled them to stand. They knew who they served. When they're standing before King Neb, listen to what they say, "Our God." I know what you remember. You remember our God is able. Yes, our God is able to

deliver us from the fiery furnace, but before they said our God is able to rescue us from the fiery furnace, they said, "Our God, whom we serve." Do you hear this? They were in a relationship with God to the point they believed they were His servants. Now, if I make myself a servant of someone, then don't I make the one I'm serving the greater? Isn't it all about Him? Then why isn't our allegiance to Him? How dare our allegiance to be to a king named Neb. It's because many of us forget whom we serve. It's one thing to know you're saved and be in a relationship with Him, Father/child, but understand that's not just a place of privilege; it's a place of great responsibility. Truth be known, there are many Christians today bowing down to the temptations of the world because they're really not in the fight, they're not in the battle, they're not in the war, they're not in a place of service; they're sitting on the sidelines, not involved in what God is involved in. Please make sure you know who you serve.

Here's what the three Hebrew children said. The God we serve is able. He is able! Able to what? To rescue us, deliver us from the fiery furnace. But I love this next phrase, "...but if not, we will not serve you." Did you catch that? I want to tell you what is taking place right here in my mind in this passage, simply; there are a clash of commands and a clash of wills. Nebuchadnezzar has given the command for everyone to bow down. What did God tell His people when He constituted them as a nation in Exodus 19? What was one of the first things He told them when He gave them the Ten Commandments? You are to have no other gods before Me. Then He says you shall not make any graven images, or likenesses, like anything in heaven, like anything on earth under the heaven, or like anything under the waters. Then He says you shall not bow down to any idols. Whoa! Did you realize that? God had specifically told His people that you will be tempted from time to time to make a false image the god of your life, and when you do, you will be tempted to bow down to it, and I am telling you that I am a jealous God! He says on those people who I hate who hate Me, I visit iniquity on the third and fourth generation of the fathers. God is saying to us daddies, this sin is so devastating that if you bow down, please know I will visit your sins on the third and fourth generation. It will affect your great grandchildren, and your great-great grandchildren!

Wow...I wonder how many of us are still facing some of the junk that great-great-great granddaddy faced. But God said to those who love Me, I will be compassionate. Do you hear me? There was a command from Neb to bow, but there was a command from God not to bow. What are you and I going to do? When God tells you the truth about something but the government says something different about it, which one are you going to go with? Our daughters cannot wait until they get pregnant out of wedlock to decide about life! If we start having feelings toward someone who is physically the same as me, I've got to know what God says before I decide what I'm going to do, because what I'm going to do is not going to be based on how I feel, but what God says is true. So I will not choose a life partner who is like me. When you get in that company and decide to go to the top and sacrifice you're family in the process, you don't get to the top because you will not bow down to that false image of success. Why? Because I serve a God who is a God of revelation and He didn't leave it up to the figment of my imagination. He didn't leave it up for me to speculate. He's given me His Word, and I can bank on His Word.

See, I know who I am, I know where I'm at, I know who I serve, and I know what He said. Therefore, when I'm in that clash of commands, I will not go with what King Neb says. Neither will I go with what the government of the United States says if it clashes with the Word of God. Do you know what the problem is? Most of us don't know what the Word says. We find ourselves in a crowd of people, bowing down, and that's really what the world wants. Do you realize that when you go along with it as a Christian, you ease their conscience? You understand that, right. I can't tell you how many times God uses Christians to be the conscience of a nation. He uses you at the breakroom. He uses you in the boardroom. He uses you in the classroom to be the conscience to speak on behalf of God to bring His command into focus.

4. They Trusted God's Will

Let me tell you what else they knew. They knew they didn't know what God's will was. They knew He was able to deliver them from the fiery furnace, but they didn't know if He would. They decided it didn't matter what God is going to do; we know what we're going to do. Let me say this

to you. They didn't stand for God believing He would deliver them from the fiery furnace by standing. They stood for God not knowing which way God's will would ultimately be, but trusting in His will. No matter which way it went, whether they died in the fire, or they stayed out of the fire, here is what they believed; they were going to do whatever God ultimately said to do. I can't tell you how many Christians get so tore up when they go through the fire, somehow believing that if you've been to church every Sunday, if you've lived a good life, if you've given your tithes, your wife isn't going to get cancer, your dad is not going to die of a stroke, or your child is not going to be killed in a car wreck. When that inevitable happens, our world is turned upside down. I do not understand that. How dare you presume on the will of God? You don't stand so God will do what you; you stand because it's the right thing to do. Can I say this to you? For most of us, God will not deliver us from the fire. Can I tell you what He will do? He will deliver you in the fire, amen. I love this story! Three went in, and when the world looked, how many were there? Four. Now you've got to understand; Neb said the only thing he knew to say. Whoa! That fourth one, he looks different! He looks like a son, not the son, a son of the gods. In other words, He's out of this world. He's not like the other three. I've got a handle on that. Now, you and I know who that was, amen. That's Jesus, pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus in the Old Testament, a Christophany. Christ showed up in the fire, and all of a sudden, the three who were bound are now loose. Whoa! If I can say this, to the best of their ability, they're enjoying the experience. They're not pressed over to the side of the fiery furnace going, get me out of here! They are walking loose in the fire. If I can say this, if you have fellowship with God before the fire, you will have fellowship with God in the fire! If you do not have fellowship with God before the fire, you will not have fellowship with Him in the fire, and when you get in the fire, it will be evident that you've not been walking with Him and you really don't know Him!

At the end of the fourth century and beginning of the fifth century, there was a great saint named Chrysostom. He stood before the emperor, and because of his faith in Christ, the emperor told him I am going to banish you from the land of your father. He said to the emperor, my Father owns the lands of the whole world. You can't banish me. Then he looked at him

and said I am going to take all of your treasures away. He said my treasures are already laid up in heaven. You can't touch them. Then he said I'll exile you to a place of solitude where you'll live your life by yourself forever. He said banish me wherever you want to, but I have a friend who sticketh closer than a brother, His name is Jesus Christ and He will be with me wherever you send me. Finally, the emperor got so mad that he said I'm just going to take your life. He said you can't take my life because my life is hidden with Christ in God. Amen! Is that what you believe? Then let's stand and let God's will be revealed in our life.