

With a View From Inside: The Fear of the Lord in Daniel
Daniel 1-6 – Part 2
Series: *Why Everything Matters*

Congregational Prayer:

Introduction: Please take your copy of the Scriptures and turn with me to Daniel 3, Daniel chapter 3. In the early days of the Church those who committed to following Christ were faced with the constant onslaught of idolatry. Worship of a panoply of gods dominated the social, religious, and economic landscape of the day, and many industries found idol worship to be a great means of financial gain. This became an especially acute problem for the artists who came to faith in Christ. They were part of a profession which made most of its living from the production of household idols to be purchased in the marketplace. And so they fretted about how their new commitment to Christ would impact their ability to make a living. Their argument went something like – we are artists and we make a living by making idols, and so we need to continue to make idols even though we are following Jesus, because we must live! But Tertullian’s response to this was a simple question – “*Must you live?*”¹

Must you live? If the choice is between worshiping more than one so-called god so that you can live, or singularly worshiping the One True God and potentially dying for your loyal worship – the question truly is – must you live?

We continue this morning with our series in Ecclesiastes by looking to the book of Daniel. I know, it doesn’t seem to fit, but at the end the sermon preached by the Preacher in Ecclesiastes he boils down life to this essential element – Fear God and keep His commandments. So we are taking a look at the Scriptural Hall of Fame of the fear of the Lord – the book of Daniel. There is no text in the Scriptures that I am aware of in which the display of the fear of God is more obvious than in the book of Daniel. And so, we are concluding our series on Ecclesiastes by looking for marks of a fear of the Lord from within the context of real life. From Daniel 1 and 2 last week we saw that the fear of the Lord resolves to resist the conformity of our world and the fear of the Lord speaks boldly of God before a godless culture.

I was planning to cover Daniel 3 and Daniel 6 and give you 3 more marks of godly fear this morning, but as I dove in on Monday morning, I just couldn’t do it. We need to spend at least one message on each chapter. So, I’ve limited us to Daniel 3 this morning to make one crucial observation about the fear of the Lord in the context of life. The fear of the Lord is marked by a singular worship of God, no matter the cost! Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not need to live, but they did need to singularly worship God! And this is true for all of those who truly and

¹ Ron Prorise, *Preaching Illustrations from Church History*, pg. 72-73.

deeply fear the Lord. They evidence a singular worship of God no matter what it might cost them. This is what is going on in Daniel 3. These three men were completely committed to worshipping the true God of Heaven, and if Nebuchadnezzar had his way, it would have cost them their very lives. The great takeaway from this chapter for us this morning is not that God miraculously rescued them from death, but rather that they were so captured by the existence and the greatness and the glory of God that they were willing to die, rather than worship at the feet of another. They were captured with God and therefore so committed to God that they would rather be faithful and dead than unfaithful and alive.

Daniel 3 presents a compelling case for singular worship of God by showing us the competition we are up against and by giving us compelling reasons to pursue this singular worship of God. The enemy of your soul wants nothing more than to hinder you from worship of the one true God – and so he goes to elaborate lengths in every age to create false worship.

I. Competition to Singular Worship

a. False Worship

- i. So, the first competition to singular worship that we see in this text is the false worship which is happening. Nebuchadnezzar has gone to extremes to present the glories of man and to command the hearts of his people to worship him and his false gods. The chapter begins by telling us that Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold which was 90 feet tall and 6 feet wide. We are not told if this was an image of himself or something else, but most likely it was a representation of what he had seen in his dream in chapter 2. But instead of making just the head of gold which was representative of him and his kingdom, he made the whole thing of gold as some kind of statement that his kingdom was going to last forever in all of its glory. And just to be sure that others did not miss that glory, he commanded that all of the government officials be gathered from all the corners of his kingdom and be forced to bow down and worship before this golden image. Notice again what is said in verse 4. *Read vs. 4-6.*
- ii. False worship here has to be commanded by one who is not worthy of worship. Nebuchadnezzar is so captured with his own glory that he is convinced everyone else should be as well. And so he commands them to see and honor his glory, or else they will face capital punishment in the fire. In other words, he is saying that you can save your life by simply obeying my command. If you will worship my way at my appointed time – regardless of whether or not your heart is in it – as long as you outwardly comply, then you will be saved from death. But if you fail to comply – then you will die.
- iii. This is the message of false worship which Satan has been peddling in this world in every age. The message of man-made religion in general is “do these things and outwardly comply to the vestments of worship of this god or that god and then you will be saved.” It is a deadly deceit.

- iv. But this isn't the only aspect of false worship happening here. The whole scene in Daniel 3 presents an alternative worship which props itself up in the place of God. The ploys of Nebuchadnezzar here show him to be the servant of the Master Deceiver. This is what Satan has been doing since the Garden. He has been seeking to draw the hearts of men and women away from the one true God and the right and pure worship of Him alone. So, from his first words in the Garden he has been seeking to setup a substitute kingdom with a substitute worship. And he does this in every age and with every display of human prowess and achievement. He seeks to use it to keep men and women enamored with anything but the God of Heaven.
- v. Just consider how this relates to the book of Revelation which is the last word on the course of human events. God reveals through John's pen how the final days are going to play out. And what is astounding is how many similarities there are between what we see in Daniel and what we see in the book of Revelation. In other words – Satan will be as hard at work in the final days as he was in Daniel's day to setup a substitute – or better – a prostitute kingdom and prostitute worship. So, for instance, Nebuchadnezzar demands universal worship of all of his main people and in the book of Revelation it will be the Antichrist who will also demand the universal worship of all people of himself. In Daniel, it is all the peoples, nations, and languages who are commanded to worship, and in Revelation it will be everyone having to receive the mark of the beast as an expression of submission to Satan's minions. In Daniel it is an image of gold made by Nebuchadnezzar which is the focus of worship, but in Revelation it will be a Satanic image of the first beast which will be made and worshiped by the people. In Daniel it is the fiery furnace which commands this false worship and in Revelation it is also the threat of death as the image is given life and is allowed to kill those who will not worship it. You see, Daniel 3 is but another precursor evidence of Satan's ultimate work in the last days to raise up his greatest effort of a counterfeit kingdom which will be filled with false worship.
- vi. But, beloved, be encouraged by the truth which will be exposed at the end of the last days as made known to us at the end of Revelation. So, the non-compliant to Nebuchadnezzar's command faced the threat of a fiery furnace. But in Revelation 20 those whose names were not found written in the Lamb's book of life were cast into an eternal Lake of Fire that will never cease. Where Nebuchadnezzar demanded all people and nations and languages to gather before him and worship, there is coming a day when God will gather before His real and true throne those from every people, and nation, and tribe, and tongue and they will with one voice glorify God in true worship! Where Nebuchadnezzar demanded robotic worship, the real King of Heaven will one day receive the full praise of hearts redeemed by the precious blood of His Son. Where

Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold as some kind of evidence of a deity, God will one day dwell with His people in the New Heaven and the New Earth – and they will dwell with Him and constantly offer Him the praise He is due. One day soon the counterfeit will give way to the real and the eternal. Even so, come quickly Lord Jesus!

b. Intense Pressure

- i. But until that day, there is constant competition in our world for the worship of our hearts. This constant competition is amplified by intense pressure. So, these three men face an unremitting onslaught of pressure in this situation which seems to demand that they worship the image.
- ii. Positional
 1. Take note of the positional pressure that these three men faced. At the end of chapter 2 we see that Daniel is elevated to ruler over the whole province of Babylon and the chief prefect over all of the wise men of Babylon. He then appoints Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to be over the affairs of the province of Babylon. That descriptive phrase – the province of Babylon – is really important in this text. As we enter into chapter 3, this phrase is used 3 different times – once at the beginning, once in the middle and once at the end – all to make the point that there is added pressure here for these men. So, this province over which specifically these three men are assigned as overseers – is now the very province in which the golden image is built and all the other government officials gather. This is happening in the front yard of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's home turf. They can't simply hide from this event or be inconspicuously absent, as though no one would notice. They can't be like the homeowner who hears the doorbell ring and pulls the curtain back to see that it is a set of Mormon missionaries and so they quickly turn the light off and act like no one is home. No – they can't avoid this one. There is tremendous pressure here relating to their position in the government.
- iii. Situational
 1. This pressure of their position is amplified by the pressure of the situation. So, just consider some of the fact involved in this situation. In verse 3 we are told that this was a special service for the dedication of the image. So this isn't a weekly or monthly deal – this is a one-time, everyone together, dedication ceremony. So, to not comply here at this one time only event is going to be a huge deal.
 2. On top of that you have all of the main important people in the kingdom gathered together. Anybody who was somebody was here – all gathered in one place. And not only was everyone here, but everyone else complies. So, look again at verse 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. No one else had the audacity to not comply, not even the other Jews who were present. Look at verse 12 to the charge that is brought by the Chaldeans to Nebuchadnezzar. They say, “There are certain Jews” – meaning that there are other Jews who are just fine, but these certain ones are not obeying your order. So, here they are singled out as the only Jews who are not complying. Not only that, but their accusers are sure to point out to Nebuchadnezzar in verse 12 that these three men pay no attention to the king; they do not serve his gods or worship the golden image that he has set up!

3. Before we progress into greater intensity of pressure once Nebuchadnezzar starts to speak – can you imagine how easy it would have been to simply justify bowing this one time to the golden image? Everyone is there and everyone will notice if you don’t bow. Every other Jew is bowing. The hot, fiery furnace is right there in plain sight to remind you what is at stake. This would seem like a pretty appealing option – to just say take one on the chin and bow this one time. But, that wasn’t even an option for these three men. They were not going to bow, no matter the cost.
 4. Once Nebuchadnezzar learns of their treachery against him, the situational pressure only gets more intense. Here is a man with absolute power who has now been absolutely mocked on the biggest day of his life – and so, you can imagine, he is hot with anger! His reaction is described as a furious rage in verse 13, and he proceeds to question these three men with an incredulous interrogation. Did you really just do that? Do you really want to test me here? He simply can’t believe that they would defy him like this and so his question is manipulative and coercive – he simply pours on the pressure for them to comply to his command.
 5. And, by the way – while all this is going on – the burning fiery furnace is right there for everyone to see. It has been referred to in verses 6, 11, and 15 – always in relationship to the command that was given. This was the ultimate intimidation factor – obey or die – was the clear communication!
- c. Can you imagine the fear of man that was rising in the hearts of these three men? This false worship which was so craftily presented combined with this intense pressure of their position and their current situation – surely God would understand if they would just bow down to the image and save their own lives! But not these men! They so valued and loved and revered the God of Heaven that they were not about to abandon singular worship of Him, even if it cost them their lives. So, in light of this competition for singular worship, consider the compelling reasons put on display in this text for singularly worshiping God.

II. Compelling Reasons for Singular Worship

a. True Worship Follows, rather than Leads to, Salvation – 3:15

- i. The first compelling reason for singular worship is found in Nebuchadnezzar's words in verse 15. He offers them one more chance to bow down and worship the image, and if they will just comply then it will all be good. What he was telling them was that worship his way will bring them salvation. But this was a lie straight from the Devil himself. There is no salvation through worship. But rather, true worship follows, rather than leads, to salvation. This is the overwhelming compelling reason for singular worship of the God of Heaven. The salvation which Nebuchadnezzar can offer is only a temporary salvation of life. His salvation is limited because his power and domain are limited. And this is the lie that man-made religion tries to tell us all the time. That the way to peace with God and the salvation of our souls is through the right means and mechanisms of worship. If we do the right things at just the right times, like bowing to a golden image when the music plays, then we will be saved.
- ii. But Jesus Christ came for a completely different purpose. He didn't come to tell us how to worship so that we could be saved. Rather, he came to give his life as a ransom for many so that we could be redeemed from our sin and transformed into true worshipers of the God of Heaven. Jesus doesn't demand that we worship Him or die a fiery death – rather, He came to Earth and died the worst kind of death – the death of the Cross – so that he could bear the punishment we deserved. Rather than demanding worship like Nebuchadnezzar, God buys back true worshipers from sin through His glorious Gospel. And if you know the redeeming work of the Gospel in your soul, then you do not need the command of a human king to make you bow in honor of your God. You do not need the ceremony and the pomp and circumstance and pressure. Rather, this worship flows freely and frequently from your heart!

b. Singular Worship Defuses Pressure – 3:16-18

- i. We see another compelling reason for singular worship of God in these three men's response to Nebuchadnezzar in verses 16-18. Look at those again with me. *Read 16-18.*
- ii. This is their response to Nebuchadnezzar's question in verse 15 – “who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?” I really don't think that you could come up with a scenario where the fear and intimidation of man could be greater for these three men. They didn't bow the first time, but now they have had time to think about all of this. Their position and their situation and the threats of Nebuchadnezzar make this the perfect mix of the fear of man. But these men are so resolved to singularly worship the God of Heaven that they are not swayed by all the pressure. Like a firm lighthouse in hurricane force winds these men hold their ground. They

can do this because they fear the Lord, and the fear of the Lord defuses the pressure of the fear of man.

- iii. In other words, their hearts are so captured by God that they are singularly committed to worshipping Him alone because they know the truth – God is God and no one else is. No one else deserves their praise or their honor or their obeisance or their acts of humble worship. They are not moved by Nebuchadnezzar's threats because they see through the sham that this whole thing is. They are being told that it is their crime which will cost them their lives, but they know the truth. If they die it will be Nebuchadnezzar's crime which will have cost them their lives. They are being told that if they don't submit and bow down then they will immediately die. But they know that it is not death to die. They know that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.
 - iv. This fear of the Lord which has so gripped their hearts makes them unimpressionable by the worlds' delights and the worlds' threats. Their hearts are so arrested by God that they cannot be swayed by lesser lights and fleeting shadows in this life. They didn't get caught up in the hype and the pomp. They didn't get moved by the ultimate authority of the most powerful man on the planet. Why? Because they feared the Lord and this defused the fear of man in their hearts.
 - v. This is so crucial for us to see and to pursue. These men knew that Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom and Nebuchadnezzar's greatness and glory were but a flash in the pan compared with the glory of their Heavenly King. And with eyes of faith they were enabled to see through the threats and the opposition and the false worship. So, where has the world captured your heart? Where does the fear of man direct your actions and move your affections? Where has your life been seized by the glimmer and the glitz of false worship? Where has the pressure of the potential consequences of being different than the world gripped you and paralyzed you? Here it is that you need to grow in your fear of the Lord into singular worship which defuses that pressure. Oh to be able to say to the world – we have no need to answer you in this matter! Your mocking and deceitful false worship has not and will not seize us or move us! May God help us!
- c. Singular Worship Secures Hope – 3:17-18, 27
- i. Notice also that singular worship secures hope. This is closely connected with the defusing of pressure. Look again at the way these men speak about their trust in God. They say that God is able to deliver them – they have no doubt about that. And they say that he will deliver them out of the king's hand – they have no doubt about that either. What they are not sure of is if God will deliver them out of the king's hand through miraculous intervention or through their physical death. They know God is able and their singular worship of Him secures their hope in Him in that they know He will have the victory here, no matter what the immediate outcome might be.

- ii. They are not presuming upon God here, nor are they demanding His deliverance. They know He is capable and they so worship Him singularly that being faithful is more important than being alive. They agree with Tertullian – we don't have to live! This is not a presumptive faith in God which demands He work in the way they think is best or right. Certainly they think that a Divine rescue here would prove to be glorious to God and good for them, but their worship of God flows out of their fear for God – meaning they do not worship God for what He can do for them, but rather they worship God for Who He is. Their hope and their eternal joy are set upon God's character. Their faith is based on God Himself, not on what God can do for them in any given moment. They recognize His Sovereignty and they know he is dealing with more than that particular moment as He rules and reigns over all things. They don't see the bigger picture and they don't presume to know exactly how God is going to act. They know He is able, but they don't demand that He must. This is the secured hope that singular worship of God produces. Because I have submitted to the fact that God is God and I am not, then my circumstantial longings which go unmet are received with a deep trust rather than with a rattled faith.
 - iii. If God had not intervened and these men perished in the fire, their faith would not have proven illegitimate or half-baked, but rather it would have proven completely true as through the door of death their faith gave way to sight. All that they believed to be true about God would have given way to the full knowledge that indeed it was just as they had been told. Can your faith stand up to that? Does your heart reverence and worship the Lord to such a depth that the lows of God's sovereignty don't go deeper than your confidence in God's character? What happens in your soul when God doesn't intervene in your life like you think He should? How does your heart respond when He hides His face of blessing even when you are convinced that this would be the most glorifying to Him and the most helpful to you? Is it possible that your hope in God is actually a hope in what God can do for you? Is it possible that your fear of God is actually a fear of man which is dressed in Divine clothes? Is it possible that you have placed yourself above God and made Him your chief errand boy to do as you see fit in the circumstances of life? My friend – there is a way out of that prison cell of self-worship. And that way out is through a right fear of the Lord. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego knew that freedom and it propelled them to an unshakeable hope in the God of Heaven. So deep and so confident that not even the threat of death could dissuade them.
- d. Singular Worship Glorifies God – 3:28-30
- i. Lastly, let me point you to one last compelling reason for singular worship. Singular worship of God glorifies God. It makes much of God in the moment and as a result of the circumstance, God's glory is brought near to those around you.

- ii. You know how this ends for these three men. They are cast into the fire – and by the way – if ever there was a fire which could kill a man it was this one. Nebuchadnezzar was so enraged by their refusal to worship him that he had the furnace heated seven times. On a side note to our side note – you also should know that the fear of man always produces anger and rage. The world is an angry place because the world is full of the fear of man. People value and respect and worship men, and then it never turns out like they want it to. Others don't respond like we want them to and we are not worshiped like we think we should be, and so like Nebuchadnezzar we blow up in a fit of rage. But back to the fire – it was so hot that the mighty men who simply took these three men and threw them in the fire were killed by its intense heat. It's almost as if Nebuchadnezzar had the fire burning the whole time as a prop, not really expecting anyone to defy his orders. But then when someone actually did, he got really angry and ordered the fire to be as hot as they could get it. He wanted to be sure that there was no possibility of survival. He wanted the intensity of the fire to match the intensity of his own rage. And the end result of that was a fire which could kill just by incidental contact. The strongest of men in the kingdom could not withstand its heat.
- iii. And yet, into this fire Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are cast. But God intervenes and miraculously spares their lives. An angel, or most likely, the Angel of the Lord, a pre-incarnate appearance of the Son of God on Earth – comes to them in the fire and insures their safety and their deliverance. You know, either way they would have known the safe passage through the fire. An angel would have met them one way or another – either to deliver them from the flames to their eternal home with God, or to deliver them through the flames to continue in their earthly dwelling.
- iv. And all of this acts as a telescope pointed into the distance of space. That which is far off and seemingly unknowable to the pagan heart – here God is brought near and here God is glorified in their view. There is no doubt in anyone's mind who has delivered these men. The God of Heaven that they singularly worshiped was the God who rescued them from the fire. This is what singular worship does – it puts us in a position of bringing glory to God and of making Him look glorious to those around us.

Conclusion: As the Protestant Reformation infiltrated England there was strong opposition from many of those in positions of power within the State run church and within the government itself. Queen Mary was the most prolific oppressor of the reformers who were seeking to bring the true Gospel back to England. Her first martyr was the man I have told you about before – John Rogers. In January of 1555 he was sentenced to die a martyr's death by being burned at the stake. No one was quite sure how these reformers would respond when their lives were at stake. No one could quite believe that they would actually die rather than recant. But on February 4, the crowd gathered and watched as Rogers walked steadily and unflinchingly to his fiery death. His courageous faith . . . his settled confidence in God . . . his unrelenting fear of the

Lord and his singular worship of God set the crowd off. They erupted in enthusiastic applause. So much so that the French Ambassador wrote home to say that Rogers went to his death “as if he was walking to his wedding.”² You see, whether in life or in death, the singular worship of God which flows out of a deep fear of the Lord always glorifies God in the end. May God ever increase our fear of Him so that we too can glorify Him in all things! Let’s pray.

² Ron Prorise, *Preaching Illustrations from Church History*, pg. 54-55.