

Hurst Green

3rd Jun 2018

Daniel 3

The Golden Image

So we are on Daniel 3 and clipping through a great book at a great rate.

Do make time to read it for yourself and to see what God has to say to you – it could be interesting!!!

Week one we asked ourselves if there were areas in our lives we should be eating more vegetables!!!

We live in a wealthy part of the world and are there areas we should be denying the rich food and obeying God so that we stand out for God honours those who honour him and we have seen twice so far and a third time in today's reading that God even makes those who oppose him honour his faithful servants.

Then in week two we saw God honouring his servants again and now in Chapter three we find the same thing – have you spotted the pattern? Are you ready to make it a reality in your life?

God had invited you to be part of his never ending plan for this earth and he wants you to be actively involved in it – it all comes down to your willingness to play your part.

And now we have chapter 3 and this familiar story of the fiery furnace.

The soldiers who threw them in were killed by its heat and we end up with Nebuchadnezzar again recognising God

Daniel 3:28 (ANIV)

²⁸ *Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! ~~They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God.~~*

Nebuchadnezzar is good at this – he acknowledges God without ever converting to worship him. We are never told why but be aware that people can be in a position of acknowledging God without worshipping God.

This is a situation many find themselves in when or some reason they do not want God in their life.

Now in preparing this the obvious place for me to go was one of my favourite passages in the whole bible because it echoes a profound theology that should be part of all of our lives.

It deals with that huge issue of what is going on when bad things happen to Christians. We know that happens.

We see it in the world around us. We can read the stories of the martyrs.

We find it in the New Testament where Christians are persecuted and are not saved by God from their suffering.

So what is this great theology?

It is Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego's defence before Nebuchadnezzar in v16-18

Daniel 3:16-18 (ANIV)

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. ¹⁷ If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. ¹⁸ 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."

This should be our confession each and every time we are asked for an answer for our faith and I am sure I could preach for several Sundays on those three verses and I know I have brought them up many times and so I should not focus on them today.

If they are not true in your lives you should focus on them for until they are your confession of faith you will be on unsteady sand. Consider a few things:

- Verse 16 – we have no need to defend ourselves. This whole matter is so self-evident that we do not need to explain our defence to you. In deed most times that fact we have ended up in this position will be because someone is trying to trip us up and so they already know the defence.
- We acknowledge that God is able to save us from anything – we see this in the New Testament and we hear it in stories of the suffering of our brothers and sisters. God often saves them in miraculous ways.
- But if he doesn't he is still our God and we will not defile ourselves – our God is still our God.

That's the short version for you to consider.

So if I am not going there what shall I preach on? Well there are many things but I think I will go for the golden statue and what can be golden statues in our life today.

For there are many things that may be golden statues but it is easy for us to dismiss them – we do not covert etc but the statues can still be used to hide God in our lives often because it is easier to hide God and have a statue than to root the statue out and have to face what God wants in our lives!!

Now the idea for this statue has come from his dream in Chapter 2 where he is the head of Gold and will be followed by inferior kingdoms until God sets up his kingdom and you know that you are part of God's kingdom that will last for ever – a good place to be!

But this statue is all gold and is for the glory of Nebuchadnezzar. He has forgotten the part in Chapter 2 where Daniel tells him

Daniel 2:37-38 (ANIV)

³⁷ *You, O king, are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory;* ³⁸ *in your hands he has placed mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. Wherever they live, he has made you ruler over them all. You are that head of gold.*

And that is the first thing about the statue that I want you to grasp hold of:

Whatever you have – however big or however little – it is **given to you by God**

All the parables about money and talents tell the same story – God gives you your wealth and all you ever do is give back to him what he has given – hence my prayer each week over the offering – or you withhold from him what is his. Choices you make.

Now as soon as we start to think of money, statues and God our thoughts go to the super wealthy – people who have so much – way more than we do.

I read in the paper yesterday that one percent of those who pay income tax pay one third of all income tax. I cannot begin to see how that happens – they have such an income that the taxman rubs his hands with glee!

But some of those are Christians and will have the awesome responsibility of accounting to God what they did with their wealth – Those to whom much has been given much will be required.

Now this is where we like to stop – none of us are in that bracket (unless one of you is hiding something and would like to talk about it afterwards!!)

So we give them their golden statues and we go on with our lives.

It is not that simple!!

Any of us can have these statues – we do not have to be super wealthy. Indeed it is very easy to have these statues in our land. Statues where money becomes important to us – very few of us would complain about having too much money!

And that is one way we can have this statue – we want more than we have – putting that a different way – **we want more than God had given us!**

This goes against the first point that I asked you to remember – whatever we have has been given by God and where ever it fits in the sliding scale of what the world sees God has chosen to put us there.

This does not mean that it wrong to want a raise or a promotion provided that you recognise before God this point – it is a matter of his provision and we are back to the confession of faith I started with – even if he doesn't he is still our God.

So wanting more can be our golden statue that we can fall down before.

Very few are going to want to be in the situation of wanting less although that can become a statue if you let it but I do not think any of us have that problem and so we will move on.

What else is there to move onto you might think.

We have covered the very wealthy

We have covered the problem of wanting more than God has given us.

Well there is the issue of what God has told us to do with our wealth.

You must have spotted by now that I continually remind you that you live in a wealthy nation and have riches that most people find unimaginable.

God has given us many instructions about wealth and money which most churches only teach about when the budget does not balance – we are blessed here, at the moment, in that we have the legacy of Nora Suter to ensure we can maintain our estate and day to day our books balance although that may all change if need want to pay our successor – but that is a story for another day.

The bible teaches about money and many like to take this down as rules and laws which are usually based around the tithe and so people use the 10% and feel they have done their duty.

They may have but our faith is not about rules, laws and duty – that was the Old Testament.

Our faith is about freedom and answering to God for what we have done with what he has given us.

That last bit is not so popular and so gets airbrushed out of many conversations.

All the parables about talents etc have the servants (us) answering to the master (God) about what they have done with what he has given them.

So we will have to answer to God about what he has given us.

And this is where we think we are OK – That statue has nothing to do with us it is a warning to all those who have so much more than us.

Now we trip over the widow's mite – you know the story – Luke 21 and only four verses:

Luke 21:1-4 (ANIV)

¹ As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. ² He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. ³ "I tell you the truth," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. ⁴ All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

A simple statement which seems to approve of the widow giving all she had to live on to God.

Now I am not going to start to teach that we should give all we have to the Church although that sort of living fits with the New Testament but actually giving is based on two of statements:

- God loves a generous giver – you find that in many places in the bible. God has given us what we have and he wants us to use it generously.

- God asks us to decide what we want to do with our money and then to do it – including how much to give.

Now those could seem to contradict each other but they do not – if we do not want to be generous we can decide not to but we will have to explain to God why we chose not to.

And this is where the statue can come into play.

We can set our statue at too little giving and then it comes before all that God is teaching us – every time we hear teaching on giving we get our statue out and place it in front of us so that we can try and ignore God's teaching.

We can also do this with a lot of giving although this end usually ends up judging – we decide God wants us to be very generous and we then decide that everyone should carry the same statue.

So statues – and remember I have only used money as the example here – these statues can crop up in all sorts of circumstances.

God has given you all that you have, all that you are and all that you could become. Only you can limit that.

God has allowed you to set priorities in your life. They can be based on God's teaching or you can base them on something else and let you hide behind your statue.

You need to ask the Holy Spirit what statues you have set up and which ones need tearing down.

Then tear them down today!!