

Daniel's Three Friends in the Fiery Furnace (Daniel 3)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Daniel

I. Introduction

- a. This fall I am teaching lessons from the Book of Daniel.
- b. Daniel is a spiritual giant, a prophet, a man of great integrity, courage, wisdom, and a powerful prayer life.
- c. “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning so that we through the patience and comfort of the Scripture might have hope.”
(Romans 15:4)
- d. First lesson, the story of Susannah, at the beginning of Daniel in the LXX. A woman who would rather go to her death than compromise her integrity. Daniel exposes the sin of two wicked elders. For centuries, persecuted Christians have taken great encouragement from Susannah’s example.
- e. The second lesson was from **Daniel 1**, the story of Daniel and his three friends being trained in the king’s court to serve in the highest levels of the king’s administration. We talked about fasting, including Daniel and his three friends’ “partial fast,” and how fasting (and partial fasting) is a powerful spiritual discipline (and weapon!) that Jesus expected his followers to practice.
- f. The last lesson, from **Daniel 2**, covered the story of King Nebuchadnezzar’s terrifying dream:
 - i. Vision of a great statue, symbolizing his kingdom and the three kingdoms that would come after him; pulverized to dust by a stone that grows into a great mountain filling the entire earth.
 1. “Then in the times of those kings, the God of heaven will raise up a kingdom and it shall never be destroyed.... It will break in pieces and crush all these kingdoms; and it will stand forever.”
(Daniel 2:44)
 2. We discussed the fact that while the Son of God did come in the time of the Romans (as prophesied), He came as a suffering servant, to provide an example for His followers. He will come again, in power and glory, to reign forever, fulfilling this prophecy completely.
 - ii. We also discussed Daniel’s tremendous humility, characterized by great love and courage.

- g. Today, we pick up in **Daniel 3** with the famous story of Daniel's three friends being thrown into the fiery furnace.
 - i. Read **Hebrews 11:32-34**
 - 1. "...stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire...."
 - ii. These three guys made it into the "Hall of Faith"!
 - iii. Their faith was demonstrated in what they did and how they obeyed and trusted God in the face of extreme trial.
 - iv. May this lesson provide great hope, comfort, and encouragement in our own trials.

II. The Story

- a. Read **Daniel 3:1-7**
 - i. 18 years after the king fell on his face in great humility, giving honor to God.
 - ii. Daniel and his three friends have been placed into positions of honor and authority over the land, serving the king and leading in his kingdom.
 - iii. King Nebuchadnezzar builds a massive gold statue: 60 cubits high, 6 cubits wide. (90 feet, or 8-10 stories tall)
 - iv. The picture: All this music/noise starts and that is the cue that everyone was to go and worship the statue.
- b. Read **Daniel 3:8-15**
 - i. Daniel's three friends are identified as ones who would not bow down. (Not sure where Daniel is!)
 - ii. The king is enraged, but ("kindly"?) gives them another chance.
- c. Read **Daniel 3:16-24**
 - i. Their response:
 - 1. Forget it! Not doing it. No compromise.
 - a. "You shall not make for yourself an idol of anything in heaven above, or in the earth beneath... You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God...." (**Exodus 20**)

2. God is able to save us. But, if He doesn't, we don't care. We will not worship that image.
3. Application: When you are in a trial (think of your own), you have choices about how you respond.
 - a. You can go right or left (Robert Frost's poem *The Road Less Travelled*: "Two roads diverged in a wood...")
 - b. Feed your flesh OR your spirit.
 - c. Obedience OR disobedience.
 - d. The hard way or the easy way!
- ii. The furnace gets stoked up (as does the king!). Big pit. Bound up. Thrown in.
- iii. They look down and see the three walking and singing and praising the Lord.
 1. Reminds me of Paul and Silas in **Acts 9**, in Philippi "praying and singing hymns to God".
 2. In great trials, we can find peace, joy, and protection – even as we go through it!
- d. **Daniel 3:25-45** – Abendago's prayer (in LXX) provides lessons for us (focus on the first part of the prayer):
 - i. God is good and just and praiseworthy (as we are thrown into a fiery furnace!).
 - ii. Confession of sin, we are getting what we deserved: You Lord delivered us to an unjust king – the most evil in any land.
 - iii. Appeal to God's promises and to His glory.
 1. Remember the covenant you made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
 2. Do not destroy us for Your name's sake.
 - iv. Read **Daniel 3:38-45**.
 1. We have no sacrifice to bring but "a contrite soul and humbled spirit", "let this be our sacrifice before You today".
 - a. Great humility and courage

2. There is no shame for those who trust in You.
 3. We fear you and trust in your abundant mercy.
 4. Let them know that You alone are the Lord God, And glorious over all the earth!
- v. Read **Daniel 3:46-50**
1. Wow!
 2. “The Angel of the Lord” (“angel” = “messenger”)
- vi. **Daniel 3:51-90** (don’t read)
1. Their song of praise (in LXX).
 2. All the elements, all creation, all the animals, sea creatures, and mankind sing a hymn to exalt God. (Rather than this cacophony calling people to the statue!)
- vii. Read **Daniel 3:91-97**
1. “I see four men untied and walking in the midst of the fire... the fourth is like the Son of God...”
 2. A theophany – the appearance of the Son of God, taking the form of an angel or a man.
 3. Wow! The Son of God shows up in Babylon, 550 years before He is born of Mary in a manger in Bethlehem.
 4. The king’s heart is turned back to God. The three are exalted and raised up.

III. How do we navigate living in 2 Kingdoms?

- a. We see that Daniel’s three friends were engaged and obedient to the king (as his top administrators), but only up to a point. They drew a line they would not cross: disobeying a commandment of God.
- b. Recognize we live in two kingdoms
 - i. Jesus established a real kingdom, with citizens (His followers), laws (His commands), rewards, and punishments.
 1. Read **John 18:33-37**

- a. Jesus says He is a king but His kingdom is not from here and is quite different than here (His subjects do not fight)!
2. Recent trip to Ireland. Very different customs and laws.
 - a. Driving on the left side of the road with the driver's seat on the right-hand side of the car.
 - b. Tipping. Eva and I sorting this out together: when, how much, etc.
 - c. Foreign land, strange, and uncomfortable.
3. When I became a Christian, Jesus' teachings were very strange for me, wonderful, but took time to learn!
 - a. Confession, humility (Brook)
 - b. Purity
4. After many decades as a Christian, the ways of the world seem strange to me! (money, immodest dress, entertainment)
- ii. Jesus *taught* that His followers live in an earthly kingdom, with earthly rulers, established by God, to obey and honor.
 1. Consider when the Pharisees seek to trap Jesus by asking whether people need to pay their taxes, in **Matthew 22**.
 2. The trap:
 - a. Condone oppressive Roman tax and alienate His followers; or
 - b. Reject oppressive Roman tax and get into serious trouble with the Roman government.
 3. Jesus' response:
 - a. "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (**Matthew 22:21**)
 - b. Obligation to pay taxes (to Caesar); God gets everything else (the whole man and all his devotion)!
 4. We live in the world, as citizens of some nation, under that nation's laws. (For us the USA). As a Christian, this can get confusing.

- a. Not always clear who I am to obey and when laws of the land might violate God's laws.
 - b. How do I relate to the U.S. and local government as a citizen in Jesus' Kingdom?
- c. Principles that help me
- i. Principle #1: God has put in place the rulers of this world, He raises them up and brings them down – and we are to submit to their laws.
 - 1. We saw this in the Daniel passage we read in the last lesson.
 - a. “.... He appoints kings and removes them....” (**Daniel 2:21**)
 - b. Vision of the statute pulverized to dust by a stone that grows into a great mountain that fills the earth.
 - i. “Then in the times of those kings, the God of heaven will raise up a kingdom and it shall never be destroyed.... It will break in pieces and crush all these kingdoms; and it will stand forever.” (**Daniel 2:44**)
 - 2. When Pilate is about to send Jesus' death, he says, “Do you not know that I have power to crucify you, and power to release you?” (**John 19:10**)
 - a. Jesus' response: “You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above.”
 - 3. Read **Romans 13:1-7**
 - a. God establishes the governments of the world/authorities (to punish evil)
 - b. If you resist these authorities, you resist God and will bring judgment on yourself.
 - c. The authorities are God's ministers (President Biden, perhaps Trump or Harris, Governor Healey) and you must obey them.
 - d. I believe some issues are a matter of conscience, different Christians will respond differently. We each must follow our conscience! But, room to disagree and not judge our brother.

- e. However, some issues are very clear! For example, pay your taxes!
4. Read **I Peter 2:11-17**
- a. We are sojourners and pilgrims. Just a passing through!
 - b. Honorable conduct, nothing bad to say about you.
 - c. Submit to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: king and governors.
 - d. Honor the king, in our actions and with our lips!
- ii. Principal #2: Pray for our "kings" and all who are in authority
- 1. Read **1 Timothy 2:1-4**
 - 2. Why pray? So that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life (no conflict/war) so others can come to a knowledge of the truth.
 - 3. "To God alone we render worship. However, in other things we gladly serve you, acknowledging you as kings and rulers of men, and praying that with your kingly power you will be found also to possess sound judgment."
 - a. (Justin Martyr, c. 160, ANF 1.168)
 - 4. "For all our emperors, we offer prayer without ceasing. We pray for prolonged life, for security to the empire, for protection to the imperial house, for brave armies, a faithful senate, a virtuous people, the world at rest – whatever an emperor would wish, as man or Caesar."
 - a. (Tertullian, c. 197 AD, bishop from Carthage, ANF 3.42)
 - 5. "We pray that your empire may receive increase and addition – and that all men should become subject to your sway. And this is also for our advantage, that we may lead a peaceable and quiet life and may readily perform all that is commanded us."
 - a. (Tertullian, c. 197 AD, bishop from Carthage, ANF 2.148)
- iii. Principal #3: We don't obey the rulers of this world when it contradicts God's law.
- 1. When religious authorities demanded that the apostles stop proclaiming the Gospel, their response: "We ought to obey God rather than men." (**Acts 5:29**)

2. Just like Daniel's three friends.
3. "... As to what relates to the honours due to kings or emperors, we have a prescript sufficient, that it behoves us to be in all obedience, according to the apostles precepts, "subject to magistrates, and princes, and powers" but within the limits of discipline, so long as we keep ourselves separate from idolatry. For it is for this reason, too, that that example of the three brethren [Daniel's three friends] has forerun us, who, in other respects obedient toward king Nebuchodonosor, rejected with all constancy the honour to his image...."
 - a. (ANF 3.71, *On Idolatry*, Turtullian, c. 200-230 AD)
4. "As there are, then, generally two laws presented to us, the one being the law of nature, of which God would be the legislator, and the other being the written law of cities, it is a proper thing, when the written law is not opposed to that of God, for the citizens not to abandon it under pretext of foreign customs; but when the law of nature, that is, the law of God, commands what is opposed to the written law, observe whether reason will not tell us to bid a long farewell to the written code, and to the desire of its legislators, and to give ourselves up to the legislator God, and to choose a life agreeable to His word, although in doing so it may be necessary to encounter dangers, and countless labours, and even death and dishonour."
 - a. (Origen, "Origen against Celsus," c. 200 A.D., ANF 4.559-560.)
- d. Applying these principles in various situations as Christians today.
 - i. First, we have rights, we live in our worldly kingdom, and it's okay to take advantage of many of our rights, especially to advance the Gospel.
 1. Passports to travel.
 2. Right not to have our possessions taken unjustly.
 3. Right not to be unfairly taxed.
 4. First Amendment rights, including the right to assemble and for freedom of expression.
 5. Paul appealed to his Roman citizenship several times to advance the Gospel.

- a. **Acts 16:35-40** (Paul and Silas are imprisoned and beaten in Philippi; Paul informs the guard he is a Roman citizen, “They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, and have thrown us into prison....” The local authorities come and plead with them to leave)
 - b. **Acts 22-23** (Paul preaches a blistering sermon in Jerusalem, and the Jews go nuts and plot to kill him. Paul is arrested (for causing disruption), and the Roman authorities are trying to figure out what to do with him and what he did wrong. Paul discloses his Roman citizenship and they send him safely (with 200 Roman soldiers) to the governor to sort out the mess.)
 - c. **Acts 24-25** (Paul left in jail for two years, appeals to Caesar for a trial, sent on to Rome.)
- ii. Second, there are laws and customs in the U.S. (and in your own country if outside the U.S.) that people follow, some which Christians should follow and some which they should not!

1. **Questions:**

- a. What laws are we to follow? Which ones should we not?
- b. Are we disobeying laws of our nation (U.S., Massachusetts) that we should be following, and thereby rebelling against God?
- c. Are there laws of our nation (U.S., MA) that we are following that we should not be following (because they are in contradiction to God’s laws)?
- d. Different people listening to this may find certain things I am about to say quite controversial, or have not given these things much thought. Others will find these quite obvious. I encourage you to study it out!
- e. These are just a few examples. You can think of others where we may need to be careful, consider, and wrestle with.

2. Pay your taxes (**Romans 13:6-7**)

- a. “under the table” income
- b. Bartering

3. A few miscellaneous laws or customs in the U.S.
 - a. Purchasing Medicaid Part B and D within 3 months of turning 65 (huge fines if you do not).
 - b. Corporate Transparency Act, fines for not filing beneficial owners (for LLC, S-Corp) of \$500/day up to \$10K!
4. Pledging allegiance to the flag
 - a. Eva and I in Arizona at Mom and Dad's church.
5. Oaths, we don't swear (**Matthew 5**)
 - a. Me: notary story
6. Orders not to gather during COVID-10.
 - a. Massachusetts law required that no more than 10 people could gather together. We followed this for about 2 months, meeting by Zoom, then ignored the law and began meeting.
 - b. God's law: don't stop meeting together (**Hebrews 10:2**, "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some")
 - c. (Also, under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution we have the right to assemble/meet together. This trumps Massachusetts law!)
7. "Going to war" (**Matthew 5**)
 - a. We can't kill others. Jesus raises the bar from "You shall not murder" to dealing with our anger!
 - b. But, what about matters of conscience?
 - i. Going to war as a medic?
 - ii. Building a submarine with nuclear warheads?
 - iii. Developing the radar system used by the submarine?
 - iv. Developing the software operating system that the submarine radar system runs on?
8. Immigration (those who are not in their country legally)

IV. Conclusion

- a. “Consider every command of the emperor that does not offend God as though it had proceeded from God Himself. And obey it in love as well as in fear, with all cheerfulness.”
 - i. (Theonas of Alexandria, c. 300 AD, bishop of Alexandria, ANF 6.159.)
 - ii. Very simple: we are to *cheerfully* obey the laws of the land if they don't offend God's law!
- b. But, let's set our minds and hearts to be ready to take a courageous stand like Daniel's three friends. No compromise if a law of our worldly kingdom violates a law of God's Kingdom.
 - i. Let's have the heart of Daniel's three friends: “I am not going there. Let the chips fall where they fall!”
- c. Let's wrestle with matters of conscience, where issues may not be totally clear. Let's pray for wisdom and courage to navigate these issues together, and to allow for disagreement in matters of conscience, while never comprising clear commands in Scripture.
- d. We are headed into an election in the U.S., Trump vs. Harris. God raises and brings down the rulers. Let us pray for our rulers, honor them (including in our speech!), and obey them with all cheerfulness, as if to God Himself.