



YOU'RE FIRED • Priority of Walk Over Work

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Daniel 3

Overview

In chapter two, Nebuchadnezzar had a dream about a statue that represented four kingdoms which would rule the world, until the Messiah came and destroyed them all. The head of that statue was gold, and represented Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom – Babylon. Daniel explained that the rest of the statue represented future kingdoms that would arise to rule the land of Babylon. In chapter three, Nebuchadnezzar builds his own statue – gold from head to toe. It was an act of defiance and a statement that his kingdom would last forever, never to be overthrown.

He required that all government officials come to pay homage and worship the image, under penalty of death. Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (here called by their Babylonian names: Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego) refuse. As he tends to do, Nebuchadnezzar flips out and demands their obedience, threatening to burn them to death if they don't comply. If he didn't have the authority to follow through, it would almost be comical what a grumpy guy he is.

In the climax of the episode, the three make their stand and say:

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. 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.

These guys are total studs. They are good, obedient, hard workers. They are civil and courteous. But they will not compromise. Only God is worthy of worship, and they will not bow down to an idol, even if it means death. When push comes to shove, their relationship with God trumps all other considerations.

Nebuchadnezzar loses it and orders that they be thrown into the furnace. Only instead of being burned to death, they are greeted in the flames by our Lord Himself, and their bonds are loosened. Incredulous, Nebuchadnezzar calls them out of the flames, and the three emerge, not even smelling like smoke. For the second time, Nebuchadnezzar is forced to acknowledge the might and glory of God, and offer Him praise. In an ironic flip-flop, he decrees that if anyone speaks against the God of Judah, he'll be cut to pieces and his house turned into rubble. Same wrath, different trigger. Nebuchadnezzar just needs to relax a little.

What's the Big Idea?

We've argued in the past two studies that a successful ministry in the marketplace will be built on three pillars: a solid walk with God, relationships with colleagues, and diligence to work hard for your employer. But those three pillars are not all equal. In chapter 6, we'll see how walking with God trumps relationships. Here, we'll observe that walking with God supersedes obedience to your employer.

What's the Problem?

Living for God and making His glory known sometimes requires us to risk things that are valuable to us, our jobs, reputations, or even our lives. If we don't properly value the worth of living obediently for Him, we're unlikely to choose the right, but risky path.



Why All the Repetition?

One interesting feature of this chapter is the repetition of long lists. Three times we are told of the “satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and all other provincial officials.” Four times we are reminded of the cacophony produced by the “sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes, and all kinds of music.” There is also a detailed description of their garments, “robes, trousers, turbans, and other clothes.” Have your group try to figure out why they didn’t use a little shorthand, and what is being communicated by the lengthy descriptions and repetitions.

What’s a Theophany?

But the most fascinating thing in this scene is the appearance of our Lord in the fire. The three experienced what is called a “theophany,” or appearance of God. Several times in the Old Testament the pre-incarnate Christ appears to His people. Can you imagine – so great was their faithfulness under extreme conditions, that God Himself joined them in the flames? Awesome. For other theophanies, see Genesis 18:1-33; 28:10-17; and Judges 6:1-23.

One Step At a Time

Finally, observe the second step in winning the heart of Nebuchadnezzar. He was impressed by the retelling of the dream. He was astounded by their survival of the fire. But is he a believer? Not yet. Kings don’t bow easily to the true King of Kings. Ministry takes time. Patient incremental progress is required.

The Point

Your job in this study is to help your people see that the commitment to work hard for your employer is not absolute. They may well be asked to do something that is immoral. That’s never right. Our sin never honors God, even if your motive is to earn future opportunities for ministry. It’s absolutely impossible that the fulfillment of the great commission could be advanced by our disobedience of Scripture.

What’s Our Response?

Evaluate how you have actually ranked the three pillars in your life. This week, watch yourself to see where you tend to obey someone other than God.

What Are the Questions?

Daniel 3

LAUNCH

What is the riskiest thing you have ever done? Why did you do it? What is the riskiest thing you have ever done for God?

EXPLORE

1. Last week, we learned the content and meaning of King Nebuchadnezzar's statue dream. What do you think was his favorite part?

7. What situations have you been in where you had to choose between obeying God and obeying an authority?

Take a look at what he does in chapter 3. Read vv. 1-3.

2. How does the dream in chapter 2 connect with this statue in chapter 3? What's different? Why?

8. What kind of tricky situations do you imagine you could find yourself in at work?

3. One of the features of this chapter is the repetition of detailed lists. Why does the author provide the full list of those who were summoned twice?

Read vv. 8-18.

The three clearly show how they rank obedience to God and obedience to Nebuchadnezzar. They are good, hardworking, faithful servants of the king. But they will not dishonor God by giving worship to anything else. Imagine their courage as they make their statement in vv. 17-18.

Read vv. 4-7.

Nebuchadnezzar demands worship of this image as proof of loyalty to his kingdom and requires all officials to bow down to it.

9. What do you think they expected to happen to them?

4. Again there is repetition concerning the litany of instruments used. Why?

Read vv. 19-27.

10. Why does the author detail their garments?

5. As employees, what should Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah do?

11. Who is the fourth figure in the fire?

Read Romans 13:1-6.

6. Are there any exceptions to the command to obey all governing authorities in Romans 13? If so, how do you discern this?

Read vv. 28-30.

12. What impact does their rescue make on King Nebuchadnezzar? Is he now a worshipper of God?

APPLY

13. What are you willing to risk in order to obey God?

15. What kinds of things seem more valuable to you than the pleasure of obeying God?

14. Sometimes we find that the risk just doesn't seem worth it. Too much is ventured against too little gain. Have you ever come to that conclusion?

16. What have you found helps you believe and experience the superior worth of God?

What Are the Answers?

1. His favorite part, no doubt, was the association of his kingdom with the glorious head of gold.
2. He is making the statue of the dream, only in his version, the gold is never replaced by silver, bronze, or iron. It is a depiction of his intention to lead a kingdom that will never be destroyed. It is a boast against the decree of God.
3. The repetition and details are meant to provide emphasis. In this case, the author is showing that absolutely everyone is expected to submit to this. Everyone. And everyone does, except for three.
4. The call to worship this image wasn't blown on some little kazoo. This was a huge deal with a massive orchestra, making an impossible-to-ignore summons. It shows the attention and pressure involved in this call to worship.
5. Allow the group to discuss.
6. Yes, there are exceptions. We aren't obligated to obey orders which cause us to sin. See also Acts 4:18-20 and 5:27-29.
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9. Discuss. It's hard to know. They had already seen God intervene by revealing the dream. Surely, that made their faith grow. But death must have been on their minds as well.
10. To emphasize that they are wrapped in tinder. Those garments would ignite immediately, and they would be burned instantly.
11. It is the Lord Himself. (See "What Do I Need To Know About the Passage?")
12. He's astounded. It's one more event moving him towards faith. But he's not yet a true believer (as the next chapter will show).
- 13.-16. Allow the group to discuss.

Memorize

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, 'O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. 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. 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.'

Daniel 3:16-18