

### *Kingdoms in Conflict – Week 4 – Daniel Chapter 3*

1. The statue that Nebuchadnezzar set up was designed to *impress* (vv.1), to *provoke worship* and the *celebration* (vv.2-5) of himself (made clear by the repeated emphasis that the statue was **set up** by the king – vv.1,2,3,5,12,14,18). How does this reflect the nature of idolatry and the heart-condition of all sinful humanity?
2. In this passage, we might be quick to try to identify with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego,

*“yet, if we are honest, we all should primarily identify with the condition of the king, for as with him, the architecture of our own soul rises to the heavens in self-adulation. And if given our way, we too are tempted to call upon everyone within earshot to pay respect to our deeds” -David Helm.*

Where are you prone to the idolatry of self-exaltation- the desire to be noticed, celebrated, and praised- in your work, relationships... even your ministry?

3. Why is it important that we consistently examine our own hearts for signs that we are building monuments to the glory of self with our lives, rather than the glory of the one true God?

#### **Expect to face pressure to conform to the world’s ways and worship its idols**

4. What are some of the most prevalent objects of worship in the world around you?
5. In what ways do you see and experience **pressure from authority** to bow down to the gods of this world?
6. How are you experiencing the **pressure of conformity** – to bow down to the gods of this world because so many around you- perhaps even those whom you love and respect- are bowing down? Have you ever felt like your relationships, your workplace dynamics, your reputation, or your level of respect would be damaged if you did not conform?

*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. -Daniel 3:7*

*With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. -1 Peter 4:4-5*

7. How are you experiencing the **pressure of syncretism** – the lie that you can be a genuine follower of Jesus, yet also bend your knee to the gods of the culture when the world tells you to or you feel like it?

*“It is not likely that we will turn away from God completely and reject him. It is more likely that we will say we are all-in for God, and continue to flirt with the idols of our age and culture. God will not tolerate open relationships!” -Guy Mason*

## Learn to resist the pressure to conform

8. How do we determine where the line is between respecting human governing authorities over us and conforming to this world? What does it actually look like to practice the “receive, redeem, or reject” principle?

*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. -Romans 12:2*

9. What practices do you have in place to foster the renewal of your mind in order that you may discern the will of God and walk in a manner worthy of your calling, especially when tested with fiery trials?
10. How can we grow in our ability to recognise the insufficiency and absurdity of the world’s objects of worship and remain faithful to God- especially when the heat is turned up and the pressure is high for us to bow and to deny what we know to be the will of God?
11. Fire has a dual meaning throughout the scriptures – it brings about judgement for those who reject God- but testing, purification and salvation for those who belong to Him. For Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, the flames of the furnace tested and revealed their genuine faith in the Lord. It became an experience of God’s faithfulness, salvation, presence and favour upon them. How do you view the fiery trials that come along in your life? As a test? As an opportunity to be grown and refined? A chance to experience the presence and faithfulness of God? Or just as a source of pain, inconvenience and setback?

## Consider the apostles’ view of fiery trials:

*Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. -1 Peter 4:12-13*

*Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. -Romans 5:3-5*

*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. -James 1:2-4*

Consider the three friends’ response to the king’s question – “*who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?*” (vv.15). They say, “*...our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.*” (vv.17-18).

12. God can save, God will save, even if God chooses not to deliver them from this moment of trial, they will not bow down- Where does this confidence come from? What might it look like for us to have this kind of confidence in the power and sovereignty of God? Do you find it difficult to remain confident in God when He chooses not to deliver you from a particular situation or act in the timing or manner that you would like Him to?

...“But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods.” **-Daniel 3:25**

- 13.** Think of a time when you have experienced the presence of God in the midst of affliction— when you have known beyond a doubt that He is with you. What does God’s presence do to your heart, your state of mind, your perspective? How can we practice a greater awareness and enter into a more tangible experience of God’s presence in our day to day lives?

*The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing. **-Zephaniah 3:17***

*Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go. **-Joshua 1:9***

*The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. **-Psalm 145:18***

*That they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, **-Acts 17:27***

*...And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. **-Matthew 28:20***

Spend some time in prayer – For specific temptations to idolatry and self-exaltation. For specific pressures we are right now facing to bow down to the gods of our age and culture- pressure from authorities and peers. For the diligence and discipline to put good practices in place, allowing the Spirit to transform us by the renewal of our minds. For the wisdom to know what to receive, redeem, and reject in the world around us, and the faithfulness to stand up and follow through when it might cost us something. For the faith we need to trust in the power and sovereignty of our Lord in the face of fiery trials - when our circumstances look bleak and we don’t know the outcome. And for the courage that only comes from knowing that our God is truly with us and will never leave us. May we walk day to day in an ever-increasing awareness and experience of the power and presence of our great God.