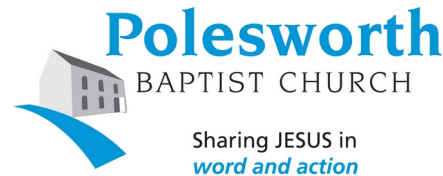


he was referring to Christ Jesus, for he cannot see the pre-incarnate Son of God so he uses words he can grasp, words which suggest an angel. But we can see it is Jesus. He is with them and He is with us. He has always been with the faithful. He may not rescue us in such amazing ways from the perils of our earthly life. But He has delivered us. And just as the 3 came forth without hair singed, with robes unscorched and with no smell of fire upon them we will be presented holy before God without blemish and free from accusation. [Colossians 1:12 and Ephesians 5:27]

The story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego was once often taught to children in Sunday Schools. That was good and right and wise, for this is a picture of faithfulness. The faithfulness of these three men. Willing to stand true to God even when all around them praise other gods. We want everyone to know Jesus, but the truth is not everyone does and many children have been teased, ridiculed, and hit by those who do not know Jesus. They need to know that God is faithful to them, that Jesus Christ is with them in all the difficulties and hurts of our lives. And we need to know that also.

These events invite us to stay true to God. Don't follow the crowd under the power of present opinion-makers, who would have you give up God and worship their carefully crafted idols. Fight the good fight of faith. But if under the pressure of peril you should fail to stand firm then don't be afraid to turn back to Him, as we read in Psalm 50 last week. Cry out to Him, like Daniel in his prayer in c9, appeal to His great mercy, seek His forgiveness and He will restore you as Peter was restored after his failure to stand with Jesus.

If it could happen to him it can happen to us, and as for him so with us, God is always ready to receive anew those who turn back to Him with the sacrifices of a broken spirit; for the God does not despise a broken and a contrite heart. Out of the bitterness we may suffer for in our faithfulness to God comes His blessing. For He is faithful to His people, like Daniel we will rise to receive our inheritance, the salvation of our lives. Praise to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Now and forever. Amen.



Beracah Blessings
Reflection for 4th July 2021
Daniel 3:16-30

At the start of the book of Daniel we are introduced to him and his compatriots Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to give them their Babylonian names, as 4 young Judean men who were carried off to Babylon in the Exile and appointed to the service of the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar.

The Exile was a deep shock to Judah, in the ending of the reign of the Davidic kings, for hadn't God had promised to David a permanent kingship, and in the destruction of the Temple – surely that undid all sense that their God was the almighty God. The material and the spiritual truths by which Judah lived were swept away by the power of Babylon. A power that came to be used as an image of all in the material world and in spiritual evil that stands against God.

Yet the book of Daniel, in a mix of history and prophecy, reveals God's sovereignty and His kingship purposes for His people and the world. A revelation expressed in the life of the young man Daniel, his three compatriots Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and their appointment to the service of the Babylonian kings – which is also an appointment to their service of God. Through them we see the victory of God over all the earth.

In Chapter 5 Nebuchadnezzar is humbled by the Lord and comes to recognise that He is the Most High God, whose dominion is an eternal dominion, His kingdom enduring from generation to generation. And in Chapter 6 we see the defeat of Babylon under its king Belshazzar. In his arrogance he set himself up against the Lord of heaven. The writing was on the wall for him and his people. He was slain as Babylon was defeated by Darius, who brought in the Persian empire, so fulfilling the first part of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, recorded in c2 as given him by God.

But it's not the overthrow of Babylon which is the highlight of the book, nor even the prophesied end of the Exile rather it is Daniel's vision of one like a son of man, a common expression for a human being, whom Daniel sees coming on the clouds of heaven, words which scripture uses to describe God. Here we see the crucified Christ Jesus, the one true Son of Man, ascending to heaven, approaching His Father, the Ancient of Days, being given authority, glory, and sovereign power. [Matthew 28:18] The kings of the earth are not in charge but He who is King over heaven and earth. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and His kingdom will never be destroyed.

This assurance of the sovereignty of God, expressed here in prophecy, realised in history by Jesus is the controlling reality of our Christian life. We live in a world which has many rulers, who set themselves up as gods, imposing their purposes on their people, but while they have temporal authority and power over us they are not God and we are not truly their people. Their pride will fall into dust, and we like Daniel will rise into our allotted inheritance.

Our reading comes after Nebuchadnezzar has set up an idol for his people to worship. His idol was a statue, today's idols come in more varied form, from Chinese communism and Western capitalism to social media, by which many strive to rule, sway and judge others, to the economy is all, to the sacredness of the NHS, to scientific beliefism and so on, so on, until the end of days. Idols occupy the hearts of people, filling the space that belongs to God, for the god of this age has blinded the eyes of many to the glory of Christ Jesus.

But Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego do not go along with it. And of course as is ever the case their 'failure' is someone else's opportunity to denounce them, and seek the favour of the king, no doubt for the prize of their blessing, be that in 30 pieces of silver or golden appointments. For Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego's 'fault' is that the commandments are words to live by and to die for: I am, the Lord said to Israel, the Lord your God, you shall have no

other gods before Me.

There's no lawyer's sub-text, no small print get-out clause, allowing His people some pc worship to escape death. It was for idolatry that Israel the 10 tribes was destroyed by Assyria and it was for idolatry that Judah the two tribes were exiled in Babylon. [2 Chronicles 36:11-17] As if God was saying to the two nations, if you really prefer these other gods before Me, then your preference will become your judgement. Nothing changes. If you don't want to know God in this life, you will not know Him in the life after this life. But before you celebrate, enthralled by Hollywood images of forever parties in a happy hell, realise what such an after life really means for God is light, God is love, God is joy, God is peace and more. What will you have if you are not with Him?

What an answer Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego give Nebuchadnezzar. Their fate is in their faith: we don't need to defend ourselves. If you throw us into the furnace, God is able to deliver us from it, and you, but even if He does not, we want you to know, we will not serve your gods or worship this image of gold.

Praise You, Lord that You should have such people. A people who have not died out, for they live in today's persecuted church. Men and women of the Church who still stand, still worship, still trust in Christ despite deathly pressure not to do so. And even if Christ does not deliver them from the powers that oppose them they will not serve other gods. Like Daniel they will rise to receive their allotted inheritance.

We are living in days unsympathetic to the Gospel. Days ever before the Church hence Hebrews writes: Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful. We are God's people and He is with us. Whatever happens to us in life, Jesus is with us. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego experienced that and Nebuchadnezzar saw it "Look!" for while they threw 3 men into the furnace, there are "four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unburned and the fourth looks like a son of the gods." Some see that as referring to an angel, but I have always thought