

Daniel 3:14-29 There is no other god who is able to rescue in this way...

Read Daniel 3

1. *Read Genesis 11:1-9.* It is quite likely that Nebuchadnezzar built his tower of gold on or very near the ruins of the tower of Babel. In light of this what was Nebuchadnezzar seeking to accomplish in his desire to have the officials (who would represent every conquered nation) bow down to it?

He would unify the peoples of the earth once more.

He was claiming to have more power than the God who confused languages.

He was seeking to bring about human glory that would once more reach to the heavens – under his kingship – and in the pattern of the Babylonian culture.

2. (14) “or” Nebuchadnezzar was not seeking exclusive fealty, he seemed quite content to let people keep their private faith commitments as long as they were unified in this public act. In our culture do you sense the pressure to keep faith convictions private? to not bring them into the social, political, economic landscape of our world? Why do you think there exists this pressure? Why do we succumb to it?

This is a personal reflection question that has no right or wrong answers.

There could be here the potential distraction of the “hot-button” issues (abortion, human sexuality etc) being brought up that depending on your group could cause division or distract from the point – perhaps decide ahead of time how you might respond if the conversation take a turn that distracts rather than helps.

In general I think we can see in the separation of church and state – which is a good division – that it has had the effect of silencing people bringing their faith into the public sphere – there can be no following of Jesus without profound public implications. Following Jesus has implication for every aspect of life – as followers it should be brought into every sphere – why don't we?

3. (16-18) Consider the faith of the three Jewish exiles. What do you think motivates their response to the King?

It doesn't appear to be fear – as the King's threat does not impact them.

It doesn't appear to be reward – they don't mention any benefit to remaining faithful.

The only motivation that seems to hold any validity is that their response is shaped by the character of the God that they worship.

It may be helpful here to reflect on what they would have been learning about who God is so far in the story that would shape such a response – or to ask what aspect of God's character would lead you to a similar response?

4. (29) "There is no other god who is able to rescue in this way" What do you think struck Nebuchadnezzar as unique about the rescue of the most high God?

He would get a God showing power by consuming the enemies of his subjects – that didn't happen.

He would get a God who would rescue from afar with an act of deliverance. This God is not remote, aloof, removed...

He seems struck by the reality that this God has come down and entered into the fiery furnace with his people.

He seems struck by the reality that this God – perhaps – and this is speculation for we are not told specifically – has been consumed in the flames that they might go free.

5. *Read Matthew 13: 36-43.* It is thought by some scholars that the fourth figure in the flames is a preincarnate manifestation of Jesus. How does this passage from Matthew 13 and this identification help us to make sense of how this story points us to the work of Jesus on the cross?

On the cross Jesus enters into the fiery furnace and suffers with us – suffers for us – he is with us in every fiery furnace. He does not rescue us from the safe distance – he enters in.

On the cross Jesus is – as Paul put it – both the just and the justifier. He both judges sin in a fiery furnace and is judged for sin in a fiery furnace.

On the cross Jesus show us the depth of his love for us – for our suffering is related to the depth of our love – we see in the suffering of the cross the depth of God’s love for us.

6. *Read Acts 2:1-12* Nebuchadnezzar sought to unify the peoples of the earth around the Babylonian culture, faith, language under his kingship through violence, oppression, and assimilation. Through his death and resurrection, by the power of the Spirit Jesus unifies the people of the earth through his sacrificial love. How does making this connection help us to understand Jesus’ work and how we might participate in it?

Jesus’ work on the cross and the work of the Spirit is also intended to unite the peoples of the earth. That uniting is accomplished by his death and resurrection and comes about through the proclamation of the gospel and the unity that receiving it brings as we become together children of the living God.

God’s kingdom then is about racial reconciliation – but at the heart of that reconciliation is the death and resurrection of Jesus.

With much discussion today about the needed work of racial reconciliation – how can the good news of Jesus shape a unique response to that work?