

HOW TO BE A PUBLIC WITNESS FROM THE POLITICAL MARGINS // Daniel 3

Homecoming message from Dr. Bruce Ashford Jr.

1. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego would not bow to the false political god of their day.

The three Jewish court officials were the target of a political intrigue based upon jealousy and ethnic hatred within the Babylonian court. Despite the consequences, they decided to be nonconformists, to disobey the king's order to worship the idol.

There are many false political gods that we are being asked to worship. Everyone is a worshipper, everyone is religious. To determine someone's god, look at what they absolutize, what is ultimate in their life—it could be power, comfort, success, approval, pleasure. These false gods coalesce at the societal level to become political gods. God's call to us is to not worship any god other than the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. They did not bend, even when immense pressure was placed on them.

King Nebuchadnezzar flies into a rage because he had been rendered powerless by the three faithful Jews—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego demonstrated that Nebuchadnezzar had no power to make them comply with his demands to worship the idol.

In response to Nebuchadnezzar's threats, the three did not scream and rage, and they also did not capitulate. They spoke the truth about reality, but they did so in a way that did not undermine their faith. They combined truth and grace. The combination of the two is essential because truth without grace makes us bullies, and grace without truth makes us wimps and nonentities.

There will come a day when great pressure is placed on us to capitulate—we must be ready to respond with grace and truth.

3. They trusted God and were willing to accept the consequences.

When we stand against the political pressure of our day, we may be punished for it—and God is not necessarily going to stop us from being punished. The New Testament makes clear that followers of Jesus will face persecution. But, even in the midst of the fiery trial, God is going to work through it. Even as God sent Jesus into the world, he also sends us—to be prophetic voices, to be sacrificial, and to be confident. We have assurance that Jesus will one day return to set the world aright.

4. God took their trust in him and turned it into a display of his kingship.

Nebuchadnezzar had intended the fire to be a symbol of his power; but God demonstrates that he is sovereign and it became a symbol of his own power—not only were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego unharmed, but they were untouched even by the smell of fire. And, what is more, they were not alone in the fire—the fourth figure may have been an angel or if may have been Christ, but God was with them in the fiery furnace.

Is the lesson here that God will always give us visible public victory? No. Our ultimate goal is not to get a particular person or party in office—it's to glorify God. Christians will find it hard to totally identify with any political party, which means we will not fit into political culture and we will face pressure and rejection. We must seek to respond with grace and truth and to honor God.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What idols or false political gods do we most often face? What kind of pressure do we face to bow to these idols?
2. What does it look like to be prophetic, sacrificial, and confident in our own particular contexts? Where do we find the wisdom and strength to do that kind of work?
3. What can we do to respond with grace and truth and honor God in this particular season?