

# DANIEL 3:1-30; DANIEL 6:1-28

## DANIEL'S FAITH IN GOD

Daniel and Revelation Series

### OPENING PRAYER

God, our rock, our refuge, our redeemer, you know our circumstances, our needs, our fears, our hopes and our dreams before we say anything to you. And yet you invite us to share our deepest longings with you and to trust you in all situations. Thank you, faithful God. Amen.

### EXEGESIS

Daniel and his friends faced two kinds of active persecution: the demand that they worship another god (ch. 3), and the demand that they did not worship their own God (ch. 6). Christians throughout the world and through history have faced such persecution. What we face in post-Christendom western societies is not active persecution and 90-foot statues, but the smothering influence of various hidden idols. The battle to be faithful may seem less fierce, but it is more insidious. Do we recognise the gods of contemporary culture we are expected to bow before and worship? They are no different from the ancient idols, but they have new images. Here are two of the most influential: 1) Mars, the god of war, the myth of redemptive violence, the sacrifice of young men and women on the battlefield to defend national interest and maintain global injustice. 2) Mammon, the god of wealth, the hoarding of resources, self-indulgence, shopping as a cultural pursuit, manipulative advertising, money as a taboo subject in the church.

The critical issue for Daniel and his friends was worship. Before whom would they bow down? This was a political as well as a spiritual issue, as it was for the early church. We should not miss the deeply political significance of the phrase 'Jesus is Lord'. This meant the emperor was not, despite his claims. It means nobody else is- not the government, the law of the land, the market, the family, church leaders, your employer or anyone else. These two well-known stories in the book of Daniel – the three young men in the fiery furnace and Daniel in the lions' den – both encourage us to develop a rugged and robust faith that continues to trust in God regardless of circumstances, a faith refined and strengthened by pressure, rather than crushed and destroyed by problems. This faith is not fatalistic or passive. It pleads with God, prays persistently, hopes for deliverance; but finally, it accepts and trusts God's love and wisdom whatever happens. This faith has powerful consequences according to the book of Daniel:

- It produced a quality of joy, peace and courage that amazed pagan kings.
- It testified persuasively to the Israelites' faith and attracted others to their God.
- It revealed the weakness of the most powerful rulers in face of loyalty to God that was stronger than the fear of death.

## REFLECTION

What would it take to destroy your faith in God? How much suffering would be needed before you denied your faith? What kind of illness would lead you to despair? Whose death would cause you to abandon your faith? How many unanswered prayers can you cope with before you stop praying? How would you react to persecution?

Probably none of us can answer these questions when they are hypothetical. But they prompt us to examine the basis of our faith. Do we trust in God because things are going well, or in spite of difficulties and pressures? In a culture where persecution is rare, where we expect doctors to cure illnesses, where death is kept at arm's length, disappointment can lead to loss of faith. We may be more vulnerable than we think.

The teaching and worship in some churches does not help. We may not actually be promised a trouble-free and prosperous life or taught that setbacks are the result of our sin; but we may be encouraged to expect blessings as normal. When things go wrong and we are distressed, is our church a place where we can grieve, lament and ask hard questions without receiving trite answers?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What other contemporary gods demand our allegiance and our worship?
2. How do you respond to the questions in the reflection section?

## CLOSING PRAYER

We pray, Lord, for discernment to recognise the gods of this age, courage to worship only you, and grace to be faithful and resilient without being obnoxious. And we commend to you the persecuted church, our sisters and brothers, praying for deliverance from evil and perseverance in suffering.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

- Ernest Lucas: Daniel (IVP, 2002)
- Simon Perry: Atheism after Christendom (Paternoster, 2015)