

Word notes Sunday 26/6/2011 Michael Meeks
Daniel 3

Summary (read this bit out to remind cell members what was said on Sunday)

Key Text: Daniel 3:1-18

King Nebuchadnezzar has missed the true lesson from his dream interpretation: that only God's Kingdom will last forever. Instead he sees the need for religious activity to underpin his rule and so sets up this very impressive monument to his power, setting himself in the place of God, and commands the people to perform regular acts of worship. He ropes in all the civil leaders and an impressive team of musicians (all the "cool" people) to command the people and lead the worship. Unsurprisingly the Jews who had remained true to the Lord refused to do this. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are reported to the king.

Remember that Michael is teaching from this book to help us understand the lessons it has for us as Christians (God's people) living in a foreign (secular if not pagan) land. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had a choice to make: did they follow along with the crowd, with all the rich accepted people or stay true to God? Perhaps they could have argued that there was no image of a god in this monument of gold and gone through the motions, after all they had risen to positions of authority and power – by staying in the king's good books they surely could do much for their people?

Likewise today we have a choice. Do we run with the crowd, not speak up when situations challenge God's authority and law or do we in humility stand apart? It's no accident that cults court the favours and memberships of the rich and famous, role models such as Hollywood stars – if you can get them then many others will follow like sheep. Conversely Jesus went to the lowly - fishermen and the despised - tax collectors and others, not the "cool" crowd or those in power. If others would humble themselves to follow him, all very well (remember the rich young ruler?).

Nebuchadnezzar also enlisted the help of musicians understanding that music has incredible power to move the spirit – Hitler's use of big showy events like the Nuremburg rallies is a case in point.

And then there's the big stick – for Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego it meant the furnaces (not the last time God's people have faced such an end), for us maybe it's social pariahship, loss of our job when we stand up for God's word on marriage & family values for instance. They were willing to go to the furnace, to pay the price of their determination to follow God not because they knew they would be saved (as indeed they were) but because the alternative was unthinkable – to turn away from the one true God.

Application (this is the bit where cell members get to participate. Lead discussions around these points)

What are some of the challenges to faithful Christians in our society today, those that make us stand out to the world?

Some of these are tricky issues to debate. Christians can appear insensitive at best, or judgemental and harmful at worst by laudable arguments from the world about freedom, human rights and equality. Are these ideals anti-Christian? How have they come to be so at odds with what the Church teaches? (*Clue – what was the object of Nebuchadnezzar's idolatry? See first paragraph above*)

What is the antidote to the "me" society of consumerism, freedom and "rights"? (Hint: Matt 6:33). What is the cost? (Hint: Matt 16:24)

Witness (this is the bit where the cell talks and prays about how to share the Good News)

Encourage everyone to be at the open air meeting on Sunday!