

Introduction

- In chapter 3, the whole question is **where does the real power lie?**
 - no longer simply a matter of international politics, of dreams of the future, of the ambitions of the powerful
 - all this comes to focus on how, in a situation of extreme danger, personal loyalty will face the ultimate test
 - Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego all successfully handled the popularity test in chapter 1 (**will you fit in with what others want you to do?**)
 - but now they, personally, face the sinister power of a police state...
- All of which raises the question:
 - **which king and which kingdom?**
 - a question for Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, **but also a question for us**
- Take the story as a drama in 3 parts...

The apparent power of Nebuchadnezzar (1-12)

- Gold = wealth
 - (did the idea come from a twisting of the dream and its interpretation??)
 - power to order people to do things - build the statue... (v.2)
 - power to order people to worship (v.5)
 - dimensions of statue are designed to impress... (v.1)
 - the whole machinery of the Babylonian state is mobilised to implement Nebuchadnezzar's order! (v.2-3)
 - the music is the best (v.5)
 - even the punishment for non-compliance is pretty impressive! (v.6)
- Not just about how great Nebuchadnezzar was:
 - also, from (v.8) on about putting God's people down...
 - who are possibly seen as usurpers, incomers (see v.12)
- **The pressure of opinion, the pressure of the system, the pressure of state sanction...**
 - sound familiar?

The apparent weakness of God (13-23)

- *Wider context - exile - has God lost his power to act?*
- Nebuchadnezzar is prone to rages (cf. 2:12):
 - these guys are in real danger!
 - alone... powerless... friendless...
- There are hints of deeper issues than mere kingly pride:
 - v.15: what god will be able to rescue you...?
 - scoffing at God - he can tell the future, interpret dreams... but can he save you? NO!
 - but remember where Daniel in chapter 2 said Nebuchadnezzar's power came from - 2:37-38 - Nebuchadnezzar has forgotten!
- Surface - God is powerless
 - Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego appeal to a king and a kingdom where Nebuchadnezzar's power mean nothing
- And so confrontation - and apparent defeat for God's men!
 - into the furnace they go, heated hotter than normal...

The real power of God (24-30)

- Amazing!
 - (does Nebuchadnezzar try to retain some semblance of power and control by ordering the men out of the furnace?)
 - God works a miracle - there is no way round it
 - God has the real power, not Nebuchadnezzar...
- God sent, some would argue an angel, some would argue the pre-incarnate Christ, to comfort and rescue S,M,A
 - whichever, the force is that God has stepped into human affairs
 - as Christ will do 6 centuries after these events unfolded
- And at last Nebuchadnezzar realises that God is "the most high God" (v.26)
 - that is a name that cuts Nebuchadnezzar down to size!
 - a God of universal, not merely Jewish, concern
 - a God, indeed, who "changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them" (2:21)
- Again we finish with the down-to-earth world of politics!
 - the great and the good, so eager to flatter Nebuchadnezzar at the beginning of the chapter, are now merely on-lookers who cannot quite believe their eyes!
 - (too much shouldn't be read into v.29 - Nebuchadnezzar is "merely" making Judaism a recognised religion, one against which discrimination is not permitted...)
 - and the final irony is that the apparent weakness of these men and their God has led them to greater power than would have been the case had they not been faithful (v.30)

Concluding Questions

- Why does God not **always** save his people from the flames?
- What is the point of this story?
- What do we learn of God from this incident?
- *Where do our loyalties come under strain?*
- Are we impressed by worldly power? (nations, armies, influence) Worldly security (homes, jobs)