

# St. Paul's Dorking Small Groups Aug 5th 2007

## Dare to be Daniel – The Fiery Furnace

### Daniel Chapter 3



#### Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon

Imagine you are a Jewish exile in Babylon in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. You are clinging on to any vestige of faith you have and then you are summoned to the Plains of Dura where people are gathered from all around. Dominating the Plain is a towering obelisk over 100ft high covered in pure gold. Music begins and you are called to worship – not the God of your ancestors but this thing! People around you fall prostrate and there are rumours of the death penalty for those who disobey! What would you do? From the ten commandments you repeat to yourself - “ I am the Lord your God who brought you out of slavery, you shall have no other gods beside me, you shall have no other gods beside me, you shall not make for yourself an idol.” What would you do?

We live in a world that increasingly brings us face to face with fear - suicide bombings and events inspired to bring terror dominate our newspapers. Foot and mouth disease on our doorstep reminds us of how vulnerable and fragile our lives could be. Nebuchadnezzar knew how to induce fear – you worship him or you die! He stoked the fires of punishment to instil terror. He held the power of life and death. It can seem that he who can induce fear holds sway in our world but the Bible consistently tells another story that is an antidote to fear and that is the story of faith.

From 1 John 4 – “ we know and believe the love God has for us... God is love and he who abides in love abides in God and God abides in him....there is no fear in love but perfect love casts out fear.” You see at the heart of faith in a God who has all the power of the universe at his command, is faith in a God who loves and cares for us so much that he would be willing to send his Son to live and die for us. It is this God that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego knew and worshipped. They were not going to bow down before an idol and compromise the living God. Amidst the cacophony of Nebuchadnezzar's call to worship the golden statue the still small voice of faith was heard through their witness.

Faith conquers fear, Faith that embraces the future whatever it may hold – good or evil, life or death - faith and trust in the living God. Faith that even embraces the furnace. The Christian faith is not some cheap insurance policy against pain, suffering and death. Shadrach , Meshach and Abednego refused to let anything come between them and their faith in God and God showed them in the most spectacular way that he loves it when his people do this, for he walks with them in the fiery furnace – read 3:24 -26. Do note that God does not deliver them from the furnace but whilst they are in the midst of it. Note too that even if God did not deliver them, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were content to entrust their lives and future to him. – 3:18.

For every Sharach, Meshach and Abednego countless Christian martyrs have gone to their deaths – what unites all who believe is trust in the one who walks with us through trials and difficulties whether we are deliverd from evil in this life or in the life to come. Whatever the flames of the furnace may do, God's eternal purposes of life and love for those who would turn to him will be worked out.



#### Witness: questions to discuss

1. Have you ever stood out in the crowd for your Christian faith?
2. What are you afraid of? How can your Christian faith help?
3. Have you ever sensed God's presence in the 'furnace'?