

Seeing is believing. TikTok and Instagram have made us all aware of the importance of one's POV – point of view. Everyone has their own point of view – their own perspective, their own agenda, their own opinion or reason for the stand they might take on any number of topics. In a reel the POV is from the creator's perspective and it's helping you to feel as though you're also experiencing the situation firsthand. If this morning's characters had social media, we'd have several POV's. Let's take a look.

In the Old Testament book of Daniel, we are introduced to 4 teenagers who were part of the first wave of exiles from Israel to Babylon. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. These Hebrew teens were chosen for their good looks and intelligence and were whisked away to be trained to enter the king's service. They were to eat only the finest food and drink. The problem was the food and drink weren't kosher, and Daniel wasn't about to dishonor God regardless of where he was living or what everyone else around him was doing. Daniel is the best teenage role model. So he and his 3 friends refused the king's food and asked to just eat vegetables. He and I would have differed on how to take a stand for the Lord, but let's not get distracted from the point. The king's officials were a bit leery about this plan but agreed to try it out for 10 days and at the end the teens passed every test, won every award, and earned a place in the king's service.

The king in Babylon at the time was Nebuchadnezzar and he frequently had dreams and visions. One was particularly disturbing to him, and he could not figure it out. His astrologers came to his side and Nebuchadnezzar said I need you to interpret my dream but here's the catch – you guys are always telling me misleading and terrible things about my dreams and I'm not up for it this time. Instead, you're going to tell me what my dream was,

since you're so smart, and then you'll tell me what it means. Well, his astrologers and wise men weren't able to do this, and they tell him there's not a man on earth who could do this. Fine, Nebuchadnezzar says, then I'll put you all to death. Here's the problem – this group of wisest men includes our 4 favorite teenagers. The guards arrive at the house to kill them, and Daniel's like can I ask why you're here to kill us? He's told about the King having a dream that he needs interpreted but he wouldn't tell the dream first and now all the wise folk are going to die. Daniel asks to see the king. So off he goes and asks for time. He gets home and says to his 3 friends, right, we need to pray. If God answers, we live, and if he doesn't, we die, but let's face it we were going to die anyway so we basically have nothing to lose. Nothing motivates one toward prayer like certain death. In the night Daniel has a vision and knows exactly what to tell the king. The next morning Daniel goes straight to the guard – take me to the king – I know what his dream was, and I know what it means. Nebuchadnezzar is so impressed he's willing to bow down and worship Daniel. Daniel says – no, I didn't do anything. I didn't interpret your dream – no man can – but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He tells Nebuchadnezzar about his dream and its meaning and then Nebuchadnezzar says surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery.

This great moment resulted in a promotion for all these young men. Daniel gets a job in the royal court with the king and the 3 friends are appointed administrators over the province of Babylon. Now all 4 of these guys as teens had been given new Babylonian names. For reasons that make no sense Daniel chose to still go by Daniel, but the other guys must have taken a liking to their new names because for the rest of the book and for all of history they've been known to us as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

Nebuchadnezzar has a few of these encounters with the one, true God. The God of all gods and the Lord of kings, the maker of heaven and earth. But he's also either the most forgetful king ever or the most insincere because at the end of most every tale in the book of Daniel the king has a change of heart – yay true God! And then the next story begins, and ol' Neb. is right back to seeing himself and/or his own false gods as on par with the God of Israel. So, in Daniel chapter 3 we see Nebuchadnezzar putting a giant golden statue up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon where Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are administrators. He then summons all the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. And in case you were wondering just how loyal everyone was to the king let me tell you who all showed up. That would be the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials. They were all summoned and they all assembled in front of the king for the dedication of the image he had set up. One scholar noted the use of repetition in this story is to create “a scenario in which conformity is normative [and] disobedience is unthinkable.” (Fewell) So you can rest assured our 3 main characters, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are right there standing in front of that statue.

A herald announced to all present – Here's what you're to do, O peoples, nations and men of every language: As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold and anyone who doesn't will be thrown into a blazing furnace. It's possible the furnace is still set up from making the statue and you'd hate to not use the furnace again after going to all that trouble to build it. This wasn't a common form of execution or torture in that era so this seems like

convenience more than anything else. Or a little Grimms Fairy Tale-ish – the children were melted down and cast into the form of statues covered in gold. This is what is wrong with everyone over 30 – we were told weird stories.

So, back to this clearly-not-weird story – the music of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music sounded and all the people from every nation, because again the people of Israel are in exile in Babylon and Babylon also has a long history of taking over and being taken so who knows how many nations are living within the sound of this orchestra – they all fall down and worship this golden image.

Except of course our 3 young heroes – Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Now, if everyone is bowing down then who was left standing up to notice the other people not bowing down? Something seems off here in this story but whatever. However, this brings us to our first point of view. The astrologers. What did they see?

The Astrologers saw a chance for revenge.

Is it possible that these are the same astrologers bested by our friends and Daniel back when they were just teenagers? The Astrologers were apparently keeping tabs on who was bowing down and who wasn't because they came forward and denounced the Jews. What they're about to do and say was extremely antisemitic. It's clear racism is what takes place here. First, they smear an entire people group by denouncing the Jews, and then they go to the king to tattle on 3 specific people. O king, live forever. You know how you've issued that decree that everyone should bow down when they hear the music and if they don't they'll be thrown into the fire? Well, **there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon – Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego – who pay no attention**

to you, O king. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up. Daniel 3:12 Exactly what does them being Jewish have to do with the fact that they didn't bow? And seems odd that you're calling out administrators of the province who are now in a higher place of authority than you. This seems like a revenge tactic and not just that the astrologers were truly concerned about following the laws of the land.

Well, Nebuchadnezzar is furious with rage. He summons the young men and asks them – Is it true? Is it true that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? Now either fall in line and prove your loyalty to me and Babylon or die in the fire. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?

Now here's the thing. Nebuchadnezzar knows they don't serve his gods – they haven't since the moment they arrived. They didn't serve him or his gods when they were in training and refused the king's food, they didn't serve his gods when they needed wisdom to interpret dreams, they didn't serve his gods when they were promoted, or when they served in his administration. Sometimes serving God is easy and sometimes it costs a great deal.

Somedays the government is fine with you serving Jesus and other days they change their mind when it doesn't fit their agenda. It wasn't about religion – because it wasn't all Jews that were being brought to the king, it wasn't about freedoms to worship who they pleased, it was about sincere devotion and loyalty on the part of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to the God they served and about revenge for the astrologers who only had an agenda of spite and hate.

Furthermore, Nebuchadnezzar knows exactly which God can rescue them – the God who is God of gods and Lord of kings. The whole thing seems a bit performative on

Nebuchadnezzar's part. But maybe ol' Neb has only seen God as wise but not yet as a rescuer or a deliverer?

And that brings us to the second point of view.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego saw an opportunity for God to deliver them.

In one of the best speeches in the Bible these 3 young men say to the king, **"O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." Daniel 3:16-18**

Well, you can imagine how that went over. Nebuchadnezzar is furious. The boys have no time to pray, no time to call a friend, to start a prayer chain, to talk themselves out of anything or backtrack what they'd just said. But, you see, those boys had been in a dangerous spot before. They'd faced the executioner another time and God had revealed Himself in a vision to Daniel. He'd answered their prayers. Deliverance had come. Their faith was high that He would come through again. But on the other hand, these are boys taken from their homeland, living in exile, away from their families of origin. They know full well not all are rescued. Not all made it to Babylon. Not all would return. Their faith in God for deliverance is in balance with their understanding that God does not always rescue as they see fit. Yet their trust and their loyalty to the God of Gods and the King of Kings is not diminished by their previous experiences. The facts remain – our God can. Our God is able. Will He? That's another question that only time will give the answer to. We cannot know the

mind of God or see all that He can see. We do not have God's POV so from our position we are sometimes left with more questions than answers, but the truth of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego's statement remains – our God is able. They were taken captive and led away to Babylon yet while there they had seen God deliver them. Oh, we know He is able, but we also know we aren't home yet. That's the tension of faith – He can but even if He doesn't we won't worship anyone else because it doesn't change that fact that only our God is able.

You have to wonder what they expected to happen next, but the king has the furnace made hotter – which is probably just hyperbole because how much hotter could a hot furnace get? He commands his strongest soldiers to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the furnace. So quickly did all this take place that no precautions were taken for the soldiers, so they are killed on the spot from the flames as our 3 young men are thrown in. They fall into the blaze. This brings us to the next point of view – King Nebuchadnezzar.

Nebuchadnezzar saw the Son of God.

The king leaps to his feet shouting for his advisors! Didn't we tie up and throw in 3 men to the fire? Certainly, O king, was the response. We all saw it. Three men went in. We've all been reading the story. You feeling alright, King? Why are you asking that? The King says, **"Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."** Daniel 3:25 But notice there's no response. No one agrees with him or expresses their own amazement. His advisers answered his question – certainly we threw in 3 men. They aren't saying anything to him about the fourth. No one's recorded counting the men again. Could they see the 4th man? Could Shadrach or Meshach

or Abednego? Is it possible the only one seeing the Son of God is a pagan king given to dreams and visions who needed a revelation of the God who rescues?

So Nebuchadnezzar goes to the opening of the furnace shouting – Shadrach! Meshach!

Abednego! Servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here! He doesn't call for the 4th man – was he already gone? Did he only catch a glimpse? Was he only visible for a second?

The 3 boys come out and are looked over by the next group who offer their point of view.

The satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers saw the evidence of what God is able to do.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were fully dressed in their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes when they went into the furnace and when they walked out the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers were able to attest that they had no burns on their skin, their hair was not singed, their robes were not scorched and there wasn't even the smell of fire on them. These were the people the 3 young men had been summoned to the plain of Dura with in the first place. They had been assembled alongside of them at the dedication. These guys were witnesses – yes, these are the same men, same clothes, same hats, no tricks, no magic, we saw it with our own eyes. The only thing missing from them is what you used to tie them up. Our 3 young men believed by faith that God was able but they couldn't see Him in the fire. It took someone else looking at their lives in the fire and reviewing the evidence afterwards to reveal that what they had believed by faith was made sight. Turns out God was all over their story.

Once again Nebuchadnezzar declares that only the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego can be trusted. Only He can rescue. And the three boys are once again promoted. This brings us to our last **Point of View: Ours.**

Here are 3 things I want you to see:

1. The goodness of God can always be trusted.

“They trusted in him and defied the king’s command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God.” Daniel 3:28 They knew God was good whether He rescued them or not. They knew God could be trusted whether they lived or died because they had a faith to live by and a faith to die by. In your life things may be good or things might be bad. You might have the money to pay for the car repairs, or you might not. You might have the job you wanted, or you might not. You might have the most perfect, angelic kids or you might be wondering why God chose you to parent this particular child. You might be in the fire or you might have just been rescued from it – but in all of it God is good and God can be trusted. It may not be fair, you might be questioning why it’s you that had to be thrown into the flames and not someone else who could live out your story – but it doesn’t change the fact that God is good, and God can be trusted to write your story. As Sharon McMahon says, “Facts do not need your approval.” God is good - Fact. God can be trusted - Fact. And God is able to deliver – Fact.

But He didn’t stop the fire. He didn’t save those 2 guards. He didn’t rescue them from the fire or the trauma or the experience. Oh, but you’ve exchanged actions for character and applied your own version of what makes someone good to the God of the universe. You see God is good because He is good. The Psalmist said in both Psalm 106 and 107 – Give thanks

to the Lord, for he is good! His love endures forever. Then, because He IS good then He also does good things. But whether He rescues us in the way we ask or believe or want Him to does not change that He can rescue or that He is good or that He can be trusted. Too often we decide if God is good by looking at the bad around us and stating well, if God were good... then He would act. And by act I mean act in the way I want or in the way I would if I were God. Or we decide if God didn't deliver us from Babylon, from exile, or from punishment then God won't deliver us from the next thing either. He didn't then. But that wasn't the POV from this story. Oh, no. God is able but even if He doesn't we'll still worship Him. Why? Because if Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had died in the fire God would still be able. God would still be good. He could still be trusted. And we would still stand and worship. That's faith – believing what we haven't seen. So whether you're staring at the fire, or in the fire, or you've come through and are standing outside of the fire checking for burns and finding none – God is able. God is good. God is trustworthy.

2. Even if you can't see God at work, it doesn't mean He's not. Sometimes you just need someone to point to Him.

There is no indication the 3 young guys ever saw the 4th man in the fire. We have no reason to believe they ever knew He was present with them, but He was. You may be in the fire today – fighting for your life, believing with all you've got that God is with you, but you can't see Him. The flames are getting higher and hotter and you're asking where is God in this moment? Where is the God who rescues and delivers, who heals and makes new, who keeps His promises and provides for His children? Where is the God who hears our cries for mercy and help? You've told everyone God is able. God is good. But where is He? If you're in

the fire then hear me this morning when I say, “LOOK!” Jesus is standing with you in the flames. Maybe you can’t see Him, but I see the evidence of His presence all over you and your family and your circumstance. There’s no way you could have lasted this long if not for the presence of the Lord. I can see Him clear as day standing with you.

The prophet Isaiah said, **“He who created you. He who formed you. Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.”** [I’ll pay the ransom for you] **“Since you are precious and honored in my sight and because I love you.”** **Isaiah 43:1-4** Don’t be afraid this morning – Jesus is with you in the fire – even if you can’t see Him. He loves you, He has ransomed you from death in your sins by His own sinless death. You are precious to Jesus because He created you and formed you and died for you. He’s with you and whether you can see Him or not doesn’t change the fact that He’s present. So hear me this morning: Look I see Him now.

3. Your testimony IS the evidence of His presence with you in the fire.

I can only imagine Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego’s faces when they hear that Nebuchadnezzar saw a 4th man in the fire with them. But whether they saw Him or not the evidence He had been there was when they held up their wrists and there were no ropes. When they took off their turban and their hair wasn’t singed. The evidence of God’s supernatural protection, His incomprehensible intervention, and His all consuming peaceful presence was seen as our 3 boys walked out of the fire unharmed and able to tell

the story of what God had done. Who else but God can deliver? When you walk through a trial and are still drawing breath and are still saying God is good – that’s the testimony, that’s the evidence – God has been present, God has been with you. Your story is I couldn’t see Him but I knew He was there because in the middle of the worst day of my life the ropes came off and I was more alive than I’d ever been before.

This morning I don’t know what your POV is – I don’t know if you’re staring down a choice to remain loyal to Jesus or to sell out for a promotion or an easier route or what you see as a less complicated life with fewer commitments. Maybe someone has started a smear campaign against you. Maybe you’re standing in front a figurative fire – a trial, a difficult decision, a crisis, a need you don’t know how to meet and you’re wondering how you’re going to make it. You’re asking God to save you and putting all sorts of conditions on that rescue – if you’ll help me then I’ll know you are who you say you are. You’re wondering where Jesus is in the midst of all this heat you’re experiencing.

Jesus has already been identified. He’s already been pointed to. We know exactly where He is in this story. Nebuchadnezzar saw Him – looking like a son of the gods – in the fire. In Daniel 7 we get a description of the Ancient of Days, the God of God’s, the King of Kings. And in Revelation 1 we have a description of Jesus that very much matches. If you’ve seen the Father you’ve seen the Son. Clothing was white, hair was white like wool, eyes blazing like fire, and **“He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.” Daniel 7:14** Where is Jesus in this story? He’s standing with you – in front of the fire, walking with you

in the fire and whether He delivers you or just stays close to you while it rages, He is still good, He is still able, His can still be trusted and He will be worshipped both now and forevermore because of it.