

Idols Don't Save - God Does!

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[0 : 00] In 1415, don't think any of you were around then were you? 600 years ago John Huff was burned alive at the stake.

John had become a Christian after reading the Bible. He began to write and teach, encouraging other people of his day to turn to Christ and to read God's words.

And having been told to stop his preaching and his writing, John defiantly refused. And because he wouldn't stop, John was bound by ropes, tied to a stake and burned alive.

And as the flames engulfed him, he prayed this. Lord Jesus, it is for thee that I patiently endure this cruel death.

In 1521, just two years ago, a church had been ordered to turn from following Christ or die.

[1 : 11] Refusing to deny their faith, they ran to their pastor's house for safety. But having been followed by their persecutors, the house was set on fire and 50 believers perished in the flames.

Now what kind of God is this? That people would die for him rather than deny him and live.

What kind of God is this? That people would literally go through the flames for him. Well, that's the situation we arrive at in Daniel chapter 3.

Daniel's three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, faced the fiery furnace, but they chose death instead of life.

Look at the very end of verse 28. It says there they were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any God except their own God.

[2 : 24] What kind of God is this that is worth risking your life for and dying for? Well, we're going to meet this God through these events.

First, we meet a God who is worthy of our worship. A God who is worthy of our worship. The king's demand is very clear, isn't it?

Verse 5. As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, the flute, the zither, the lyre, the harp, the pipes and all kinds of music, when the band gets going and the conductor starts up at the orchestra, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.

Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace. Now, given those two options, bow or burn, it might seem quite obvious which one you'd take.

If you want to save your life, well, bow down and worship. But here's the problem. Nebuchadnezzar's image is not a real God.

[3 : 39] It's a substitute God. It's not too long ago, you'll remember from chapter 2, that Nebuchadnezzar had the dream. Do you remember his dream about the great big statue?

Gold head, silver chest, bronze thighs, iron legs, feet made of iron and clay, and they all represented, the four different metals represented four different kingdoms.

And the dream was interpreted for Nebuchadnezzar, and this is what was revealed to him. Look at chapter 2 at the very end of verse 38. Chapter 2, the very end of verse 38.

As the dream is interpreted, he says, You are that head of gold, Nebuchadnezzar. You are that kingdom, the head of gold.

But, verse 39, After you, another kingdom will rise, inferior to yours. Your kingdom, Nebuchadnezzar, will be crushed and destroyed.

[4 : 48] Another is going to take its place, And ultimately, down at verse 44, chapter 2, In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people.

It will crush all those kingdoms, and bring them to an end, but it itself, the kingdom of God, if you like, will endure forever.

That was the dream that was interpreted to him. He's been introduced to the true God. But, rather than worship the true God, Nebuchadnezzar has set up a substitute God.

Chapter 3, verse 1. King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold. Perhaps he thought if it was all gold, then his kingdom wouldn't be broken down.

Ninety feet high, and nine feet wide. And it's set up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon, where everybody could see it.

[5 : 56] In an act of defiance, King Nebuchadnezzar rejects the true God, and he replaces it with his own God.

This is the God that the nations must come and worship. Now, Ender Kenny mightn't have the resources to set up a gold statue for us.

But every day, you and I must decide which God we're going to worship. Will it be the God of secularism?

Listen to this quote from a book called No Gods But God. He says this, When we cease to worship God, we do not worship nothing, we worship anything.

We do not just eliminate God, we erect God's substitutes in his place. He goes on to say that the biblical writers call these replacement gods idols, or in this case, it was a statue.

[7 : 06] An idol, he says, can be a physical object. It could be your iPhone. It could be a property, your house. It could be an activity, a sport, or music.

It could be a role, the job that you have, an institution, the club or society that you're a member of, a hope, I wish I was married, a pleasure, food or drink, a hero, a sporting star, anything.

We can take and push God out of the way and replace it with someone else or something else. And that's what we've really done.

We've set up our own gods that demand our worship. Something or someone that we serve in return for, in the hope that they will somehow give us happiness, pleasure, success, security.

And we live for our gods, in the hope that they will give to us everything that we want. Nebuchadnezzar was offering his god as a god of security.

[8 : 21] Worship this god and you will be safe, you will be well, you will be in a wonderful kingdom with a great king over you. But here's the problem.

They're substitute gods. They're counterfeit gods. They're not the true gods. You see, it's ironic that the god they must worship is actually man-made.

Did you see that back in verse 1, chapter 3? King Nebuchadnezzar made an image. Ninety feet high, nine feet wide, and set it up.

And in case we can't see the contradiction of a god that has to be made by a person, the writer keeps on reminding us right the way through the passage. So look at the end of verse 3.

We're told there that all the officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, that he made. And they stood before it.

[9 : 27] End of verse 5. They were ordered that they must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. You know that great big statue in the middle of the plain over there, the thing that he constructed with all the scaffolding around it?

He set it up. He made it. End of verse 7. All the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshipped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

It's made. This is a god that's supposed to be real, but it's fake. It's counterfeit. Listen to the psalmist, Psalm 115, verses 2 to 8.

What they say about our so-called gods. The question is raised, why do the nations say, where is your God? Our God is in heaven.

He does whatever pleases him. But their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men. They have mouths, but they cannot speak.

[10 : 35] Eyes, but they cannot see. They have ears, but they cannot hear. Noses, but they cannot smell. They have hands, and they can't feel. Feet, but they cannot walk.

Nor can they utter a sound from their throat. Those who make them will be like them, utterly lifeless and worthless.

And so will all who trust in them. You see, just as the people of Babylon bowed down to this lifeless statue of gold to gain security, if you bow down to this statue, you're not going to die.

I'll look after you. You'll have security. You'll be fine. So we bow down to our dead idols of work, of relationships, of sport, whatever it may be, to gain success, to gain satisfaction, in the hope that they will somehow fill us.

But the point is they're all God's substitute. They can't give the eternal security that each one of us long for. They're not the real deal. They're dead.

[11 : 53] And that's why the three friends will not bow down and worship. Man-made gods are not worthy of our worship. The philosophies that our society throws at us.

Forget God. Don't believe in God. Go your own way. Go with your feelings. Follow the God of secularism.

Write him out of your lives. Don't listen to the word of God. Listen to your own word, to your own mind. God. But it's dead.

It's lifeless. It's not a true God. So, we meet the God who is worthy of worship for he is the one and only true God.

Second, we meet a God who is able to save. A God who's able to save. The pressure to bow down and worship continues, verse 12. You have the officials here who've been following the king's commands but they've noticed something.

[13 : 04] They tell us in verse 12, there's some Jews whom you've set over the affairs of the province of Babylon. You know those three characters, 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. Perhaps they've become very jealous of these three outsiders because they've all risen to positions of power and they're not in the positions of power and they want them kind of removed.

Well, whatever reason for them telling tales to the king, it puts them in further danger of the fire. Verse 14, Nebuchadnezzar said to them, Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up?

Now, when you hear the sound of the horn, the flute, the zither, the lyre, the harp, the pipes, of all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good, you'll be safe, you'll be okay.

But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into the blazing furnace. then what god will be able to save you from my hand?

[14 : 23] Come on, what god is so great that he is greater than me? Bow down to my god and I will save you from the fire.

Well, at one level there's no doubt that Nebuchadnezzar could save them from the flames. he had the power to do that. That's what he's saying to them here. But that's not where these three guys put their faith.

Look at verse 16. What an extraordinary answer to give when they're being threatened with death itself in such a brutal fashion. Look at what this says in verse 16.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter.

We don't even need to answer you. We don't need to try and get out of this threat and try to explain why we're not bowing down. You see, our God is more powerful than you.

[15 : 28] Our God is a saving God. Verse 17, 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. Absolute confidence and assurance under such pressure in God's ability to save.

You can throw us into the flames, that's okay, because our God is able to save. How could they be so confident of God's salvation?

Well, for them history has proved it. God had saved his people from Egypt. God had saved his people time and time again through the judges like Samson and Gideon.

God had saved his people through kings like David and Solomon. Their whole history is an experience of a God who intervenes and saves time and time again.

[16 : 44] That is what this God does. And that's the confidence that we can have too. Because God is a God who delights in saving his people.

He's more powerful than anyone or anything. After all, God has proved it in history ultimately through his son, Jesus Christ, who died but rose again from the grave, defeating death.

We have a God who saves. That is what he does. Now, because our God is a saving God, we can trust him with our life.

verse 18. But even if he does not save us, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.

Now, hang on a minute, that just seems like a contradiction, doesn't it? I just thought you said that God is a saving God. and now he's saying, well, maybe if he doesn't save us, so does he save or does he not?

[18 : 00] Well, look back carefully at verse 17. Read verse 17 again. If we are thrown into the blazing fire, the God we serve is able to save.

They don't say God will save us, they say the God we serve is able to save us. He might not save us from the flames of the furnace.

We might get thrown into the furnace, we might lose our life, we might die, but you know what? We know that our God even has power over death itself.

And I think that's the message of verse 18. They are saying, you know what, you can throw us into the flames, but we worship a God where even death is not an obstacle to him.

Now let me ask you this, what God substitutes can save like this? We can serve the God of pleasure, we sacrifice our lives to the idols of work, but they can't save us.

[19 : 18] us. We obey the demands that our gods place on us, that we must do more, we must give more, but for what purpose? They have no power over life, they have no power over death, they can't rescue us, they can't deliver us.

And so the three friends refuse to bow in worship, because they trust in a God who is worthy of worship and who is able to save.

So we meet a God who is worthy of worship, a God who is able to save, and we also meet a God who is willing to die for us.

These guys wouldn't bow, so the threat has been carried out, verse 22. The king's command was so urgent, and the furnace so hot, we're told back in verse 19, that it was heated seven times hotter than normal, it had become so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to the entrance of the furnace.

The flames just engulfed them and burnt them. And these three men, verse 23, firmly tied by ropes, fell into the blazing furnace.

[20 : 48] It seems like the God of these three friends is unable to save. Where is he? Well, God has not abandoned them.

He's actually present with them. Look at verse 25. The three of them have been cast into this burning furnace, and King Nebuchadnezzar is peering, looking into the flames.

Verse 25, he says, look, can you see? I see, it's not three, four men walking around in the fire.

They're unbound and unharmed, and the fourth one, can you see it? It looks like a son of the gods. Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out, come here.

So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the fire. Who, who was this fourth person that was walking around with them?

[22 : 09] Well, Nebuchadnezzar tells us in verse 28 that it was an angel. Was it more than an angel?

Writers tend to think that it was the angel of God, the pre-incarnate Christ, present with the people.

Well, we can't say for sure, but what is without doubt, here is a God who not only saves, here is a God who is present with his people as they go through the fire.

God didn't take the furnace away from them, but nor did he abandon them in it. And this is the kind of God that we have.

He is committed and faithful to his people, to his servants. He doesn't always take us away, take the hardships away from us. He doesn't always remove the difficulties of life.

[23 : 14] Very often, and mostly the case is that he lets us walk through the fire of suffering, but he is always present with us in the midst of our suffering.

Our God is not just present though, as God was with these three guys. He is willing to die for us. Look how these three friends emerged from the fire.

Comes in the middle of verse 27. They've come out of the fire and they're looking at them, and look what they saw. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was there a hair of their heads singed, their robes or their clothes were not scorched, and there wasn't even a smell of fire on them.

Now this smacks to me of complete and absolute salvation. There's no sense in anything at all that anything was lost.

Complete and absolute salvation. salvation. Now that can be our experience too, but in a much deeper way.

[24 : 45] You see, the God who walked into the furnace with these three friends, is the same God who walked into the ultimate furnace for you and for me.

Jesus Christ wasn't immune to the suffering of this world. But he entered into this world for you and for me, and went to the cross.

But why? Why did he have to do it? Well, like Nebuchadnezzar, we've all rejected the true and living God. We've all from time to time replaced him with our own false gods, our dead gods.

We've all broken the first commandment, gods, you shall have no other gods but me. We've all done it. And instead of giving God, the true God, the worship he deserves, we worship someone else or something else.

We've looked to other things for security in our life. And God has made it very clear that all those who do not worship God will be judged and separated from God in hell for all eternity.

[26 : 11] That's what will happen. But Christ intervened into our world. He walks where we deserve to walk. In our place, Christ went into the fiery furnace of judgment for us.

On the cross, Christ suffered the flames of God's wrath. He took my sin, your sin, on himself and the judgment fell on him. He went into the heart of the fire itself.

He descended into hell for us so that we don't have to. And all those who trust in him, the fire of judgment will pass by.

And it will be like the end of verse 27, where the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was there a head of their head singed, their clothes not scorched, there was no smell of fire on them.

There will be no judgment, there will be no condemnation, there will be no separation. Instead, complete and absolute salvation, eternal security, eternity, with God forever and ever.

[27 : 29] You see, here is the God who not only walks into the flames with us, but he walks into the flames to die for you and for me.

Now, all of this explains why John Huss, 600 years ago, and the 50 members from that church two years ago, were willing to die rather than deny their God.

Like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, look at verse 28, the end of verse 28, 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.

as Nebuchadnezzar himself would say at the end of verse 29, for no other God can save in this way.

They worshipped a God who is not only able to save us, a God who is present with us, but a God who is willing to die. Now, let's just make it a little bit more personal.

[28 : 50] Is this a God you could die for? Is this a God I would die for? He's walked through the ultimate furnace for us so that we may gain eternal security, eternal life with him.

That means you and I can face into the troubles of this life and know that he will never abandon us. Sometimes we may feel the flames are raging, but God is present with us.

He will not leave you. He will walk with you through the fire of the troubles that you go through. It also means that you and I can face death itself and know that we are safe and secure.

For people, for some, and maybe for somebody here, those flames will be actual, real flames. as you die for preaching Christ, where he is violently opposed, people face that kind of death.

But for those who go through those flames, God will raise you up and take you to be with him forever. Whenever we face death, he is the one and sure place to have our faith.

[30 : 16] death, this is a God we can live for. This is a God we can even die for because he died for us.

Let's pray together. listen to Jesus' words.

Jesus called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said, if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.

father, teach us to follow you. Teach us to pick up the cross and walk the path that you walked in the knowledge that we are safe and secure for all eternity.

[31 : 42] Knowing that our God is able to save and even if we should enter into troubles or hardships, we know our God will be with us and our God will take us to his eternal kingdom forever and forever.

Give us confidence to stand strong for you, that we would not bow down to the idols of this age, but worship you alone.

we pray this for your glory and for your honour. Amen.