

Daniel 3

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[0 : 00] King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold whose height was 60 cubits and its breadth 6 cubits. He set it up in the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.

Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

Then the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, and the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all of the officials of the provinces gathered for the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

And they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And the herald proclaimed aloud, You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.

And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning, fiery furnace. Therefore, as soon as all the people heard the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image.

[1 : 20] That King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Therefore, at that time, certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews. They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, O king, live forever.

You, O king, made a decree that every man who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image.

And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning, fiery furnace. There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

These men, O king, pay no attention to you. They do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up. Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought.

So they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up?

[2 : 24] Now if you are ready, when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good.

But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning, fiery furnace. And who is the god who can deliver you out of my hands? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.

If this be so, our god whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning, fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.

Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated, and he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and to cast them into the burning, fiery furnace.

Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning, fiery furnace. Because the king's order was so urgent, and the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

[3 : 49] And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning, fiery furnace. Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste.

He declares to his counselors, Did we not cast three men bound into the fire? They answered him and said to him, True, O king. He answered and said, But I see four men, unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they're not hurt, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods.

Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning, fiery furnace. He declared, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out and come here. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire, and the satraps, the prefects, the governors, the king's counselors, gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men.

The hairs of their heads were not singed, and their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them. Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants who trusted in him, and set aside the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own god.

Therefore, I make a decree. Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb in their house laid in ruins.

[5 : 19] For there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way. Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon. Good morning.

I have a question for you. Before we get started, and I hope to bring us back to the time that the sermon has ended.

Are you willing to follow Jesus into the flames? Are we, as a church, willing to follow him at great risk?

You say, well, Pastor Jay, we live in America, and we're not in some ways. Well, we are.

Perhaps more than you think. Let me pray, and then we'll get into the text. Heavenly Father, we give thanks to you this morning, and we praise you for your word from this very ancient but real text today.

[6 : 33] I pray, oh God, that we would hear you, that we would hear your heart for us through it. May we listen, may we obey, we bless and we honor you through Christ our Lord.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.

How's that? Now let me be able to see you. Good. We're ready. By the time we get to Daniel chapter 3, we're no stranger to Nebuchadnezzar.

The Lord has delivered Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into his hand. We saw that, didn't we? He ordered the Jewish captives to undergo what could well be termed a Babylonian makeover.

This was in preparation for service in the king's court. Daniel and his friends were among the number.

- [8 : 29] In chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar had a dream, didn't he? Huh? And he struggled. He struggled. He was challenged to know the dream and its interpretation. Daniel comes forward and helped him to see that God had appointed him as a world power for a particular season.

Huh? While he was told that the head of the goal of the statue was him, he also was warned that world empires that would follow him, they were marked for destruction.

And so by the time that we get to our chapter today, some years have passed. And rather than being humbled by this particular dream, and he himself acknowledged that truly your God is a God of gods and Lord of kings and revealer of mysteries, chapter 2, verse 47, it seemed like the king was as bold as ever.

As a matter of fact, he may have dug in his heels a little bit, taken steps to confirm his kingdom and his stature. So by the time we get here, he's erected this 90-foot tall, 9-foot wide statue.

It's on the plain of Dor somewhere in the province of Babylon. And he's called for the officials of his kingdom to come to the dedication of this particular image.

- [10 : 04] Did you notice in the hearing of the text that what we have here is basically a call to worship in the first part? Look at there, 11 times the word worship is mentioned in the book of Daniel.

And guess what? All of them are in this particular chapter. You see it there, chapter 3, verse 5, they were to fall down in worship. Verse 6, they were to fall down in worship.

Verse 7, 10, and on and on. It was a call the king had issued, a call to worship. But particularly, note in verses 1 through 7, where we see false worship is commanded.

False worship is commanded. If you had gone to Babylon, that day would be akin to going to downtown Chicago. Only there was just one tall building. 90 feet tall, 9 foot wide.

It's stunning. Behold, especially when the sun hits it just right, it glitters. It glitters because it is plated with gold. Perhaps this was Nebuchadnezzar's statement to make permanent what the Lord said was but temporary, his kingdom.

- [11 : 28] The image is best seen as a statue representing the patron god Nebu or Nabu. Nebuchadnezzar's own name was connected with that. The gathering was to commemorate or to celebrate Nebuchadnezzar's rule.

It included rituals that honored the king in ways similar to how gods themselves are honored. Dedication like this were ideal for pledges of loyalty.

I remember as kids, you know, I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States. This was a pledge of allegiance, if you will. The Babylonian officials that included Daniel's friends, all of them are called together.

There's an element of humor when you hear all these officials repeated again and again. It's a lot of pomp and circumstance that's going on.

What the writer is helping us to see that this here is a big, big deal. And there's a sense in which you've got the whole empire and then you've got these three kids, these three young men.

- [12 : 35] The participants were there were supposed to be falling down in worship. They were commanded to fall in worship, the golden image that had been set up by the king, royal musicians.

They even had a worship band that was there. Six instruments are mentioned where when the band started to play, they were to bow down their knees.

The heads, foreheads were to hit the ground. And that was an act of worship that particular day on that particular occasion. And again, it amounted to a declaration of commitment, a pledge of allegiance to the Babylonian government, if you will.

And it was a capital offense if you did not do what was commanded of you. Bow or burn. That was the decree.

And for most of everybody that was there, it was a very, very easy decision. They complied, they complied even without giving it much thought.

[13 : 48] According to verse seven, look at it. Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, pipe, here we go, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, all the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

It was a call. Call to worship, but it was a call to false worship. Think about it. Why do otherwise?

Why not bow down? This was just a one-time kind of dedication. I mean, let's get on with it, get it out of the way, and move on with life. What would keep one from complying?

Just a one, not such a big deal. One time, let's move on. Ah, but there were those among them for whom even one time was a breach of honor and a breach of integrity.

What does one do? When an authority, whether it's a government, a boss, or whomever, demands something of you, something of me that violates our faith and violates our conscience and violates our Christian commitment.

[15 : 06] What do we do when someone's higher up with the name, a position, some kind of authority, demands of us something that we are not supposed to give?

What do you do when someone asks you to give what belongs to the Lord in Him alone? Do you, without thought, comply, fearing that not doing so would put you at risk in some kind of way?

Friends, those are the things that you and I must think about, and sooner or later, whether it's a big deal or a small deal, because the small deals get you ready for the big deal. You remember what happened in Daniel chapter 1?

It was a matter simply of diet. But the diet had already been cast. The line had been drawn. These were covenant-keeping Jews. They had a commitment to the Lord God.

Again, diet, a relatively small thing, but here it was. It was going to get worse, and it certainly did. False worship commanded, verses 1 through 7.

[16 : 16] False worship resisted, verses 8 through 23. According to these particular verses, not everyone bowed when the music played.

There were at least three worship holdouts in the crowd. How do we know? Oh, we see that. Notice what's said there. Look at verse 8. Therefore, at that time, certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews.

They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, O king, live forever. You, O king, have made a decree that every man who hears the sound of the instruments shall fall down and worship the golden image.

And whoever does not fall down shall be cast into a burning, fiery furnace. Hey, king. Hey, there's some people out there. There's some Jews who are out there.

You know that strand of people, that monotheistic strand of people that have a great history of God working in, through, and on their behalf.

[17 : 28] They're out there. They ignore you. They don't pay any attention to your commands. They refuse to get with the program. And because of this, they're called to appear before the king.

They are interrogated, but they are not intimidated before the king. Again, the mold had been cast.

The mold had been cast before they arrived in Babylon. We have, when we are, we have the guest registers, and the kids on this side, they have dubbed themselves the front row club.

And I, and it's, it's on the guest registers. And you can say, well, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were a part of a front row club themselves back in Babylon. They had signed the line.

They had heard the word. They had made their own commitments. Huh? The loyalty to what had been taught, had been demonstrated in chapter one.

[18 : 31] And the stakes were higher now. They had not taken the path of least resistance then, and neither did they here in this particular incident.

Now, the king's stamp may have been on their paychecks. But the law of God was written on their hearts. And that is where their ultimate loyalty was.

Loyalty to God. What about you? Who signs your check? What do they demand of you? And how do you comply?

Sometimes employers, government, who often can demand of us what belongs to God and God alone.

don't surrender. Don't prostitute yourself on the altar of popularity or prosperity in order to get the favor to comply to the demands of godless kind of people.

[19 : 47] Huh? The king's livid. He's burned up. Look at verse 13. Nebuchadnezzar in fury, furious rage, commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought.

They are brought. So they brought these men before the king. That's what he says. Okay, guys. Let's go over it again. The music is going to play again.

We're going to give you another opportunity. And so note the king's word. But if you do not comply, there's one thing that awaits you.

The fiery furnace. So they go in. Don't you love what you see there in verses 16 through 18? This is right at the heart of the chapter.

These are the only speaking words that we hear of these young men. But what powerful words they are. Listen to them.

[20 : 49] Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, O king Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king.

God is able to do that. The commitment of resistance, the faith of these three was undaunted by the king's speech, unmoved by it.

In their hearts, the line had already been drawn, their minds had already been made up. Where was their commitment grounded? It was on the bedrock of the very first commandment of the Decalogue, Exodus chapter 20.

You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything in heaven above or that is in earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth.

You shall not bow down to them or serve them for the Lord your God is a jealous God. Exodus chapter 20 verses 3 through 5. Listen to me, friends.

[22 : 01] You don't make decisions like this in the heat of the battle. You don't make decisions like this in the midst of vacillating and changing kind of emotions.

No. You draw the line beforehand. You make up your commitment beforehand. Before the flame or even before the threat of the flame.

so many people find themselves dancing and end up slipping because they haven't made the right kind of commitment. They haven't established the right kind of direction.

Huh? You don't make decisions like this in the heat of battle. Just like marital loyalty. The pledge is made.

The ring is on your finger. She can be the other girl can be as cute as she wants to be. But the commitment is made. Oh he can be tall, dark, handsome, muscular.

[23 : 08] But the commitment is made. I mean so think about that in the spiritual realm. Where as to where your commitment lies. Think about your baptism and the statement of your baptism that it makes.

Jesus has said I give my self to you and you in Christian baptism say Jesus I give myself to you. I belong to Jesus. Jesus belongs to me.

Commitment is made. The only speaking word powerful statements of trust that we see in verses 16 through 18. We trust in the Lord and he can answer for himself.

We know that he can. God ultimately is up to him. We know that he's able to do it. All we can say is that our God whom we serve is able.

That's faith friends. These young men had grasped the reality that people of biblical faith have been embraced for centuries. Paul expresses that in 2nd Corinthians 7.

[24 : 13] I'm just going to read just a litany of I he is able kind of statements. God is able to make all grace abound towards you. Ephesians 3 and 20.

Now unto him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we ask or think. 2nd Timothy 1. Which is why I suffer but I'm not ashamed for I know in whom I believe and I'm convinced that he's able to guard that which I've committed unto him against that day.

Then there are others but the great one that we find in Jude verses 20 and 24. now unto him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the throne of his glory with notice with great joy.

God is able. So several possibilities exist as far as how you can view the verse but any way you slice it it amounts to a confession of faith and God's ability to deliver while at the same time recognizing his sovereignty his choice not to do so if he so chooses faith in God was firm regardless of God's sovereign choice.

Notice what you see in verses 18 19 through 23 the consequences of resistance you see that there the words and actions of Daniel's friends infuriated the king the heat of the king's fury was only matched by the temperature of the furnace so heated that the executions themselves were executed and Daniel and his friends notice in the last part of verse 23 Daniel's friends fell bound into the burning fiery furnace worship commanded worship resisted but notice in verses 24 through 30 true worship is vindicated God's actions in these verses trumps the actions of the king the king said death king of heaven said life in verse 24 we see an astonished king look at what he said then king

[26 : 33] Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste he declared to his counselors did we not cast three men bound into the fire they answered and said to the king hey king that's true he answered and said but I see four men unbound walking in the midst of the fire and they are not heard and their appearance in the fire is like a son of God everything that the king did God undid if you will the king said death king of heaven said life he's amazed at what he saw in the furnace of fire while he may have expected the ashes of three men at best he saw four living beings in the midst of the fire and one of them was supernatural from a purely human standpoint something's wrong with this picture but from a faith perspective it's just right are we not told in psalm 34 and 11 the angel of the lord and camps around about those who fear him and delivers them did not the lord through isaiah say when you pass through the waters i will be with you and through the fire they shall not overwhelm!

you when you walk through the fire you shall not be burned and the flame shall not consume you and then the songwriter put it well what he said when through fiery trials thy path will shall lie my grace all sufficient shall be your supply the flame shall not harm thee i only design thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine three men bound in the fire now unbound three humans put in the fire now a fourth person a god like supernatural human superhuman was there who was this person some would opt for the pre-incarnate christ and whereby that may be true as one commentator puts it it's safer to say that what we have here is a reflection of Emmanuel God who is with us look at verse 26 don't you love what we see there king nebuchadnezzar comes to the door of the burning fiery furnace he declared shadrach meshach and abet nego servants of the most high god come out and come here then shadrach meshach and abet nego came out of the fire the same men who were cast into the fire they come out of the fire the fire has no!

power over their smell of fire was on them it was as if they had not been in the fire at all in verse 28 the king answers his own question he had asked the question in verse 15 who's the god who will deliver you and then he says blessed be the god of shadrach meshach and abet and you go huh what can happen friends when you and I follow Jesus even into the flames as here true worship is vindicated it was then and our true worship and dedication and loyalty can be vindicated today huh what we see in the text bears witness as Daniel's friends had done the right thing huh they had worshipped on their feet huh there are many worship various worship postures false worship they were bowing down on their knees heads on the ground but

Daniel and his friends were worshipping standing up worshipping on their feet huh worship includes not simply what you bow down to but friends what you stand up for and through their stand others in exile were likely emboldened to do the same worship true worship vindicated they were emboldened not to forsake the God of the covenant under pressure their lives were testimony that the Lord is honored through those who fear God more than they fear death think of the response of those in exiles when they heard about this court conflict and their outcome and oppressed persecuted people or we awaken and their resolve because of the faith of these three worship true worship was vindicated the faith of God's people is strengthened when we take a stand the way that we supposed to and this was certainly a big one for the original audience imagine you're somewhere in the

Babylonian empire when this account comes to you how do you respond how might it have been spoken to the audience who first read about this court conflict think about oh what there may have been t-shirts made go go hey these are the guys hey they stood they stood under conflict they stood in the midst of fire they're our kind of guys the word gets out to Babylon to other exiles and those about those who are in high places taking a stand and just think how one might feel wow it's encouraging it's like when you see yourself reflections of yourself and someone else that you admire I think of when Barack Obama was voted in as president and what a boon that was for

[32 : 32] African Americans it was in a sense an affirmation of who they were who we are again because it causes you to take a stand to walk a little taller I mean every time you see the president walk the brothers are encouraged because he has a little bounce in it he's one of us the word gets out to the exiles in Babylon they're encouraged they're emboldened because of them or perhaps it shames them because they have not taken the kind of stand that they should have under persecution think about this Paul writes I want you to know brothers that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to the rest that my imprisonment is for

Christ Paul stand his imprisonment was an encouragement for those who would embrace the gospel Paul's there he's standing he's in prison does that mean that we go into hiding no we come out of the woodwork because someone else is taking a stand we're going to take a stand too the lives of these three speak of the power of God that enables us to stand in a world that screams from every corner beckoning us to bow in some way to compromise biblical principles sometimes it's the state that beckons us to do so while we respect the state our primary law our primary allegiance is to the God who has authorized the state that sometimes abuses and misuses its power we're reminded in

Acts chapters 4 and 5 when the apostles got called on the carpet say hey this is what you guys need to do I know that you are preaching and teaching in the name of Jesus but here don't say anything don't preach or teach any longer that name wait a minute whether it's right in the sight of God you figure that out for yourself we cannot but speak what we have seen and what we have heard and not only that it's better to obey God than to obey man their refusal to bow and worship previews what we see in our Lord in the beginning of his earthly ministry both Matthew and Luke show Jesus being tempted by the ruler of this world Satan all these things Satan says I will give you if you fall down and worship me what were Jesus words he said you shall worship the

Lord your God and him only shall he serve echoing backwards echoing forwards his Jesus words are instructive for us and his faithfulness enabled him to not sidetrack Calvary but to go into Calvary and its flames as it were for you and me he went to Calvary in order to rescue us from the fires that await those who do not embrace him did also notice that the king demanded allegiance with the threat of death at the beginning of the chapter at the end of the chapter he threatens death and ruin for anyone who speaks against the God of Shadrach Meshach and Abednego here's the deal a law gets on the books because of the faithful witness of Daniel's friends policy is established because of the faithful witness of

Daniel's friends impact positive positive impact calls a true worship sometimes we don't think in that vein we think about it going downhill but taking a stand can have positive societal kind of impact God gets good press because someone took a public stand the impact true worship is vindicated God's servants eventually are promoted exalted if you will you see that in verse 30 the king promoted Shadrach Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon they get promoted but it was not before passing through the fire their incarceration their humiliation preceded their exaltation the pathway from appointment to exaltation was through the fiery furnace friends you and

[37 : 59] I must be reminded that today in our world of our exilic status in this world Peter writes about it we are strangers we are aliens we are not of this world while God's kingdom has indeed been inaugurated through Christ its fullness is yet to come and in the meantime as we wait we wait as strangers here when beckoned by the powers that be whatever that those powers that might be they may be even on a college campus or in a college classroom whenever beckoned to bow the knee resistance is in order even at the risk of what is near and dear to us what am I saying today through this passage we understand that the living

God is a God of deliverance and that God gets the honor that he deserves through those who honor him and fear him more than they fear death or more than they fear man will we be such people are we willing to follow Jesus through the flames wherever those flames might be I encourage you we're going to sing a song invite the musicians to come but we're going to leave on this particular song and already we have sung songs that should reflect our dedication and our commitment he who would value it be I encourage you to re-up to renew to recommit to this God of deliverance as you examine what I call fog we are to live in the fog fear of

God we are to live in that that is to be the atmosphere in which you and I live he who would valiant be against all disaster let him in constancy follow the mighty master there is there's no discouragement shall make him once relent his first avowed intent to be a pilgrim this is not we're just passing through let me pray and I'm going to bring you to your feet heavenly father we thank you for what we see in this text and we pray that what we see here reflects us even at it as it gives reflections of our great Christ be glorified in us is our prayer amen and amen let's stand together