

Daniel 3

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Date: 26 October 2025

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, good morning. As you're finding your seat, let me tell you the reasons for which I stand. I'm standing today to remind you from this chapter that godly resistance has its rewards.
- ! In fact, I want to encourage you to build your life upon the soul-enriching benefits that await all those who will resist the demands of an ever increasingly ungodly world.
- Chicago is a city known around the world for its architecture. Many people will say that the best thing to do while visiting here is to go on an architectural tour.
- I would agree. We are home, are we not, to the world's first skyscraper. We continue to experiment with the latest designs. It was Blair Kamen, one of Chicago's leading architectural critics, who described the role of architecture this way.
- Every building is a new piece of the evolving metropolis. It's an unflinching record of who we are and what we do.
- [1 : 2 1] It connects us, Kamen writes, in time and space to those who went before us, even as it represents our legacy to those who come after.
- That's why architecture matters. It's a manifestation of the human desire to make its mark positively on the world.
- Underneath it, in the underbelly of it, we want others to know who we are, even long after we've left. And in reading Daniel 3, you get the distinct impression that Nebuchadnezzar would have loved the city in which we live.
- Chapter 3 opens, look, on the plains of Dura, in the province of Babylon, on a work site selected for Nebuchadnezzar's bold architectural wonder.
- My Bible reads that King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold whose height was 60 cubits and breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.

[illegible]

To get some perspective on Nebuchadnezzar's wonder, it would stand approximately 90 feet in height constructed on a base of only nine feet in circumference. Whether it had buttresses to hold it up, the writer does not let us know. Just to keep it from falling over would have been an architectural feat that even Josh Dortsbach, our own structural engineer would have had difficulty doing.

Most telling though, the writer emphasizes that it was an image set up by the king. I hope you caught the repetition of those words as the text was read in your own hearing. There's a repeated use of the words set up and it's meant to play on the reader's mind for they confirm to someone who's been following the book that not everything is right with this king. You remember in chapter 2 after God revealed the king's dream to Daniel, he praised God by saying, blessed be the name of God forever for he removes kings and sets them up. This expression that there is a God greater than any king who sets up and takes down kings. But now nine times over Nebuchadnezzar is said to be setting something up. The reader is to recognize without ever having been told what he is doing. He's setting something up to impress you and celebrate himself. Know anybody like that?

Lewis Mumford in his famous book, *The City in History* writes, the new mark of the city is obvious. A change of scale, deliberately meant to awe and overpower the beholder. What we now call monumental architecture is first of all the expression of power. The purpose of this art is to produce respectful tear. In simple terms, people set things up that the rest of us might come and bow down. In fact, Nebuchadnezzar's architectural wonder then was nothing more than an idol of his own making. It was to be worshiped. Don't lose sight of this.

The word worship, like set up, is also used nine times in the reading this morning. He set something up in order that the world might come and worship it and fall down at his feet. Now let me just stop there for a moment because it's easy to throw King Nebuchadnezzar under the bus.

Aren't the actions of Nebuchadnezzar though a perfect picture of the architecture of the human heart? Do not all of us, at least on the underbelly side of our nature, work to set things up that would draw others to revere us, even fall before us. Down through the ages, this is the architecture of the human heart.

You could go all the way back to the building of the tower of Babel in Genesis 11. You could go here to the image constructed on the plains outside of Dura. You could go to your own life work, which you are now building and constructing. And if for the wrong reasons, we're all subject to setting things up that others come and bow down.

One writer put our foolishness this way, we are attempting to build a culture that would give us an immortality of sorts. By our own ingenuity, we hope to transcend a divinely ordained boundary.

You see, it's all too easy for us to stand outside this story and sit in judgment on Nebuchadnezzar. Even when we read the story, how many of us tend to do so by merely identifying with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?

Our tendency is to identify ourselves with those friends, those courageous ones who resisted the call to worship anything other than God. And that, this is what I'm here to tell you first this morning, that the architecture of the human heart is something that needs to be applied to every soul under the hearing of my voice.

[8 : 57] The condition of the King is the condition of us all. For like him, our heart rises to the heavens in self-adulation. And if we were given our way, we would call everyone else within an earshot to pay respects to what we do.

It's no laughing matter. It's the reason we find ourselves on the wrong side of God. It's why humanity is in one sense under his wrath, his judgment, his confusion.

Why he continues to tear down until we finally see and take notice of what he has set up. You see, this story, we'll get to it on the back end as well, is already a hint that God himself intended to set something up in the world, which was to be worshiped.

Psalm 2 says that he's laughing at what we do and he will set up a king for himself to which all the nations are to come and worship.

It's a picture in a Christian understanding of what he does through his own son, lifting him up on a cross as an object of his wrath and judgment, but also of his mercy and love.

[10 : 16] Psalm 2 says that he would draw us to replace our architecture built into us at birth to elevate our own souls and to bow before him.

This is the call of the Christian gospel. The architecture of the human heart gives way in the text in verses 8 to 18 to the necessity, therefore, of godly resistance.

Godly resistance. You've got to fight against where your heart wants to go.

The necessity, I want to talk of, of godly resistance. When Daniel and his friends seemed at this point to have prospered in Babylon, it's not going to last.

Friendship with the king in chapter 2 through what Daniel had done on their behalf gives way. They're going to fall out of favor. They resisted.

[11 : 18] Therefore, at that time, Chaldeans came forward, verses 8 and following. Hey, king, you made a decree.

Whoever does not fall down should be cast into a furnace. You know, there are people that are resisting your command.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, they say, come to mind. They pay no attention to you. They don't serve you. They don't worship your gods. Nebuchadnezzar's response to those three a little further on is both humorous and tragic.

He says to them, but if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a fiery furnace. And who is the God who will deliver you out of my hand? In fact, the writer repeats this dedication-like event on the plains of Dura.

So now, guys, I'm giving you a second chance when you hear the music and the choirs and the instruments and all of this. We'll do it all over again.

[12 : 33] And when it happens, bow down and worship. It's going to go well with you if you capitulate to me that which I want and demand.

They resisted. It's an incredible line. I hope you saw it.

Oh, Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. It's like, you know what? We don't need to go take a council vote on this. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us and will deliver us out of your hand.

But if not, be it known to you, O King, that we will not serve your God to worship the golden image that you have set up. This is speaking truth to power if ever we have seen it.

The architecture of the human heart, the necessity of godly resistance, our own world is filled with examples.

[13 : 34] Now, let me just give you a brief wondrous run on examples that testify to godly existence.

Five in number. We could talk about the Egyptian midwives who wonderfully disobeyed Pharaoh out of their fear of God. We could talk about Peter and John who stood defiant in the face of a Jewish council when they were threatened to stop in order to stop preaching in Jesus' name.

We could look a little further in church history to Augustine who picks up on the principle of resistance during what he knew as the rule of Rome where he writes, an unjust law is no law at all.

We could actually go to the moment where democracy is fomenting in our world, which gives birth to a revolution here to overthrow a government by way of opposition.

We could look at John Witherspoon who in 1768 gave his lectures on moral philosophy. He applied godly resistance or resistance in general to almost any form of government.

[14 : 44] Listen to what he writes. It is frequently observed that in every government there is a supreme irresistible power lodged somewhere in king, senate, or people.

And if the supreme power were ever lodged come to be exercised in a manifestly tyrannical manner, the subjects may certainly, if in their power, resist, he goes on, and overthrow it.

That's armed conflict. That's the American Revolution. That's resistance on an ultimate scale.

That's resistance. Witherspoon plays at the edges though as well. Wisely he goes on and writes, but this is only when it becomes manifestly more advantageous to unsettle the government altogether than to submit to tyranny.

For to say that we might resist legal authority every time we judged it to be wrong would be inconsistent with the state of society and the very first idea of subjection.

[15 : 59] So choose wisely the outcomes, the ends, the reasons for which one resists. But godly resistance is a mark of necessity living in the world that we do.

The midwives. Peter and John. Augustine. Witherspoon.

Martin Luther King Jr. What distinguished the resistance of the civil rights movement in our nation's history was the extent of the outcome and the reasons for which resistance occurred.

It wasn't to overthrow tyrannical government. It was to move on the conscience of the citizenry in ways that would reform the government under which we were living.

And so when he's writing from the Birmingham jail he says, quote, I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice is in reality expressing the highest respect of law.

[17 : 24] Now why do I give this kind of run on examples? It's because we need careful, reasoned, thoughtful conversation and discourse even in our present day.

I speak as an older man in our midst to an emerging generation that is in my heart of hearts crying out for well reasoned, widely read, thoughtfully considered understandings on what it is both individually and beyond to be exercising the necessity of God.

Of Godly resistance. These three you have to acknowledge in the text put everything on the line.

But let's acknowledge this they did not have revolution on their mind. They weren't trying to overthrow Babylon.

That's one. They were not even trying to reform Babylon. That's two. They were not even attempting to bring the idea of religious liberty to bear on the conscience of Babylon.

[18 : 56] That's three. They were not even asking all of the community of the Jewish men and women to join them as though there was supposed to be some corporate ecclesial voice.

They just did what their conscience told them they must do. They made a distinction between their individual participation or lack thereof and what they would throw on an entire community.

Now, we just lived through COVID a few years ago. And one of the things that was so discouraging to me was well-thought Christians manifesting resistance to governmental authorities for one reason or another quickly led to, and if you don't do what I'm doing, then you're not part of the remnant.

Well, I don't know. Be thoughtful. Be clear. Think it through.

These three had come to a moment where their relationship with God and their relationship in the world were at a complete impasse.

[20 : 12] They were between a rock and a hard place. The only way they saw forward to retain their relationship with God was to resist this particular command of the king.

And so I call this their but-if-not moment in life. This is an absolute resistance.

This is an irrefutable moment. This is the coercion of the government that would cause them to abandon their faith with God. This is not a matter of compromising with the world.

The text that you're reading is a matter of capitulation to the world. There's no guarantee, they say. But if not, I feel comfortable in my own skin.

He can deliver me. But if not, I'll take the consequences. You know, I stood a few years ago with Pastor Nee in the city of Oxford.

[21 : 21] Broad Street. Brick pavers. Circular emblem. Cross painted. Marking the spot where Latimer and Ridley were burned at the stake because they wouldn't capitulate to the ruler of England at that time on the conscience of their convictions.

And as the flames, you know, they're tied to a stake. This was their absolute moment. Having had gunpowder tied around their neck.

And a pyre above them. And as it was lit and going, Ridley's wood was wet. Had trouble burning.

Was extending the torture of his own life, given his convictions. And he cries out, Lord, have mercy upon me. I can't burn.

He wasn't burning. Latimer yells from his own pyre. Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man.

[22 : 32] We shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England that shall never be put out. I mean, I don't know if he said it or not, but it's fun to read. Amen.

And there's no idea why you're saying it or not. People putting it on the line. I have heard the story told and know it to be true.

that there are those in an underground church in a far distant country who once gathered online to be able to know how to handle the Bible.

In the midst of the training, the knock on the door, the detention of governmental figures, the detaining of pastors, the writing down of names, there are people laying it all on the line, exercising godly resistance.

Are there any rewards for living like this? Remember at the outset, I told you I stood up today to talk about godly resistance has its rewards.

[23 : 50] I encourage you to build your life upon the soul-enriching benefits that await all those who resist the demands of an ungodly world.

Let me give you four. Well, let me give you three for the sake of time. The resistance of these three resulted in unexpected favor in the world.

I mean, that's the end of the story, right? I mean, just take a look at it. Verse 29, this is the therefore decree. This is the second decree.

This is the consequence of their resistance from the one who actually laid down the command. Any people, nation, language that speaks anything against the god of these three shall be torn limb from limb.

Houses laid in ruin. There's no god who can rescue in this way. And then look at verse 30. And the king promoted them in the province of Babylon. I just want to say that as you're standing in a world thinking about the architecture of the human heart, and you're going to fight against elevating yourself in ways that would be worshipped, but rather fall at the foot of the cross through the one who is to be worshipped, and you therefore are at odds at some level with the world in which we live, you need to know that at times there's unexpected favor, even in the world.

[25 : 26] That's ironic. The chapter opens with a king making a proclamation that requires you to bow down and worship. It closes with the same king declaring that you don't speak evil or ill against the god of these three.

What I'm trying to tell you is, yes, godly resistance has its rewards. One, at times, unexpected favor.

Two, and this one is important to me because I think it matters, especially for the many of you who are coming and listening week by week, but not yet a Christian, which I'm just thrilled to see this happening as people keep inviting others to explore what this Bible story is having to say.

Even if you're not a Christian, though, there are benefits to what I would call godly resistance. The resistance here kept their souls unstained by the world.

Now, what am I drawing on? I'm drawing on an old man that we've all heard his name and very few of us has read. I'm thinking of people like Plato and Socrates and works like Gorgias, which actually is a timely read right now for all of us.

[26 : 48] It's a book that would teach us that wrongdoing, if any kind, actually corrupts our character. When we do wrong, it corrupts us.

It leaves us burdened with guilt, shame, decay. In other words, even in a non-Christian world, thoughtful people are thinking through, I need to resist stuff that damages my own soul.

Whether I believe in the Christian God of Christ Church Chicago or not, they call this virtue, do they not? They call this the idea that it's better to suffer harm yourself for doing something right than it would be to get out of harm but do something wrong.

In the work of Gorgias, we read, if it were necessary either to do wrong or to suffer it, I should choose to suffer rather than do it.

They're picking up on something. There's a reward for godly resistance. It's called virtue. It's called an unstained soul. That's called a reward. Now, you've got to keep coming here to let us explain to you that every soul is already stained, but let's just leave that aside.

[28 : 09] There's rewards for you today. Don't injure yourself by abdicating on principles that would damage your own soul, let alone change the neighborhood in which you live.

So, godly resistance can result in unexpected favor in the world. Godly resistance can keep your soul unstained by the world.

Finally, godly resistance was met in these three, not only with God's presence, but his deliverance from the world. Look at his presence.

Isn't that just the most curious of things in the Bible? Suddenly, a fourth man is standing in the fire with them. Now, I know it's easy, especially if you're a Christian here this morning and go, that's Jesus.

Before Jesus, that's Jesus. Well, it doesn't say that's Jesus. It says it was a man. I mean, it could have been an angel. I don't know. I mean, we can't speak definitively, but we do know that God's presence was manifest with them by putting a man in there among them.

[29 : 24] I think of the New Testament often talks about Christians that are persecuted and how, whether through the presence of the Holy Spirit or this apparition in the life of Paul, the Lord stood by me.

The Lord strengthened me. If you're a person of faith, you need to know that when you're in the midst of godly resistance, you're never actually alone. It's a beautiful reward to have the presence of God in the midst of your resistance.

Second, not only God's presence, but look, his deliverance from the world. Let's read this story in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Do you see it? It's in the words that ground the entire chapter in resistance. Verse 18, O king, we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image you have set up.

We're not going to do it. That is a, there's a later echo in the ministry and life of Jesus of Nazareth.

[30 : 37] Matthew 4, 8 to 10, when the devil takes him to a high mountain and shows him all the kingdoms of the world. And he says to these, all of these I will give you if you will fall down and worship me.

And then Jesus says to him, be gone, Satan. It is written, you shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve. The same words.

The connection between your text and Jesus isn't merely through the activity of God in the life of Jesus when he's fighting the devil and having to resist capitulation to the world.

But on the very cross itself. Jesus, according to our teaching, is lifted up on the cross as payment for the folly, the absolute stupidity.

That we could somehow outbox God and take glory that belongs to him. And he's lifted up on the cross, not for his own sins, but for the architecture of the sins of the humanity's soul.

[31 : 49] And with true irony then, Psalm 2, 6 is fulfilled. God set up for himself a king on Mount Zion so that all who would fall, bow, worship, learn to follow, give themselves to him.

They'll be delivered from this world. From the fire. Not trials because the fiery ordeal you should never be surprised about.

But fire in the scriptures has two roles. One, and I'm about done, is to purify us. So sometimes the hard things we're in the midst of are good things because they're purifying us as we fight an ungodly world that would run us.

But there's a longer, later, larger fire to be avoided. Scriptures are clear. This son who God set up is going to return.

There will be a day of fire. And all those who do not bow the knee to him will be cast into everlasting fire away from the presence of God. Why?

[32 : 59] Because you lived your life with an incredible affront to a God who was so merciful as to give you his own son as the remedy for your own heart.

Think it out. The way you and I prove our faithfulness to God is by submitting ourselves to the word of Christ in both our worship and our service.

So let me shut it down. The architecture of the human heart is a real thing. You're not as distant from Nebuchadnezzar as you might think.

The architecture of the human heart must be resisted. Godly resistance must be a part of our lives.

Setting things up that others would worship is an affront to God. Whether we see it in our own life or another life or in the hands of a government, it is an affront to God.

[34 : 00] Resistance is not without its rewards. Even if in the midst of it, I'm taken out of the world. At least I'm unstained by the world.

At times I experience unexpected favor in the world. Ultimately, I will know God's presence and deliverance from this evil world. So Christ Church Chicago.

Godly resistance. Is necessary. Godly resistance has its reward.

There are two kingdoms. There is one king. And he's at the right hand of the Heavenly Father.

To which every knee. Every knee. Shall bow. So let me give you this on the way out. Words from Richard Baxter. What do you do in the meantime?

[35 : 11] He says this. Up. And be doing. Run. Run. And strive. And fight. And hold on. For thou hast a certain glorious prize before thee.

Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for these ancient texts. Help us to be thoughtful in our engagement with them.

And help us to never capitulate our belief. And worship someone or something above your son.

And give each person here wisdom. And give each person here wisdom. Discernment. Strength.

Charity. Graciousness. Conviction. To do their best. In living their life in your presence.

[36 : 20] We ask in Jesus' name. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thank you.