

Our God is Able

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[0 : 00] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, your word is true, your word is powerful, and the Holy Spirit is powerful, and we ask that you might speak powerfully to each one of us this evening, and that we would respond in obedient faith. Amen.

Amen. Yippity, yippity, yippita. Oh no, Rex, it's not time for the fat lady to start singing. Well, if you don't listen to AFL on the radio, and especially 3OW, then I've probably already lost you. But surely everyone in Melbourne has heard of Rex Hunt. Here is in the news again this week. The chief executives of some of the football clubs have accused Rex Hunt of being self-indulgent in his football commentary.

Accused? I mean, it's a lay-down misere. As one sports writer commented on Thursday, Hunt last week spent hours indulging himself in a trademark rambling defence of his style. He made a lot of noise, but only one clear point. It's all about Rex Hunt. I mean, surely you've been listening to a football broadcast in the dying minutes of a game, and your team is maybe about eight points down.

[1 : 31] The ball is in the forward line, and Hunt is just ranting on about something. And he's usually telling a story about himself. As the journalist stated, it's all about Rex Hunt.

I mean, has this impacted 3OW's ratings? Only positively. I mean, it's amazing. But yes, even if it's not quite so in your face, each of us have a love of self not far below the surface.

A deep desire for the approval of others as well. Not that an addiction to gaining other people's approval is always because of indulgent self-love.

It can, in fact, be driven by low self-esteem or, indeed, a dependent personality condition. But I'd like us to just try this little test as these statements come up on the board.

I want you to keep a mental tally as to how many times you would answer yes as we go through these nine statements. Firstly, if someone disapproves of me, I feel like I'm not very worthwhile.

[2 : 44] Just keep a tally as you go. Secondly, it's extremely important to be liked by nearly everyone in my life. Thirdly, I've always needed the approval of other people.

Fourthly, I believe I need the approval of others more than most people do. Five, I need others to approve of me in order to really feel worthwhile.

Six, it bothers me a lot to learn that someone doesn't like me. Seven, other people have a great deal of control over my feelings. Eight, I want everyone to like me.

Nine, I need the approval of others in order to feel happy. Well, we've run through those pretty quickly. But the developer of the quiz suggests that if you answered yes to five or more of those statements, then approval is a big deal in your life.

So let me ask, how much approval do we actually need to be happy? Do we need our own accomplishment to be the object of our devotion? I want to introduce you to someone tonight who not only wanted others' approval, but indeed demanded their worship.

[4 : 03] You're commanded, O peoples, nations and languages, that when you hear the sound of the horn, the pipe, the lyre, the trigon, the harp, the drum, and the entire musical ensemble, you're to fall down and worship the golden statue that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.

Well, Big Neb, as we've got to know him in recent weeks, King Nebuchadnezzar, the king of the world power in the 6th century BC.

Big Neb was in love with himself. And as we see in this chapter, he was addicted, addicted to the approval of others. So would you turn with me in the Bible to Daniel, chapter 3, page 719.

We're going to start off by looking at the first seven verses, which I've simply titled, The Big Neb.

We pick up the narrative of chapter 3 some years after chapter 2, perhaps as many as 10 or more years after chapter 2.

And Daniel begins recounting this historical event. King Nebuchadnezzar made a golden statue whose height was 60 cubits and whose width was 6 cubits.

[5 : 20] He set it up on the plain of Jura in the province of Babylon. Friends, this is a massive statue, something like 30 metres high and about 30 metres wide.

The question is, is this an image of Big Neb or is it an image of one of the Babylonian gods? Well, the text isn't explicit. But the sense, I think, is that this is an image of the king.

I mean, look with me. Let's just quickly flick down through the verses. Verse 1, King Nebuchadnezzar made. Verse 2, the statue the King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Verse 3, the statue the King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

5, the golden statue the King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. 7, the golden statue the King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Verse 14 with the quote, And you do not worship the golden statue that I have set up.

Friends, this is the problem of self-worship. Marilyn Manson, who will be known to, we don't have a lot of youth here tonight, but will be known to some, and others will have never heard of the name.

[6 : 29] Well, he's the pale-faced, morose, heavy metal rock singer. He's certainly not known for his theological pronouncements. He nearly got it right when he stated the following.

He said, Satanism is not about ritual sacrifices, digging up graves and worshipping the devil. Satanism is about worshipping yourself.

Big Neb needed the praise of men. And needing the praise of men is the opposite of acknowledging God. So, living for the approval of others, for the praise of others, this is insidious idolatry.

It is in itself actually a form of idolatry. So the King erects this massive statue. It was Big Neb's accomplishment.

To bow down before it was to worship the King's masterpiece. And it's interesting that the word in the Aramaic, in the first verse, translated simply as statue, is literally image.

[7 : 43] And for those who were here last week, that's exactly the same word that was used in the King's dream, in chapter 2, verse 31. We're meant to see the connection between the two.

Well, at the end of chapter 2, or if you're here with us, it seemed on the surface that Big Ned was praising God. Friends, for him and for us, words are so easy.

And the issue is always, what's the fruit? You see, here in chapter 3, this is where we see the real response of the King to the dream.

Nebuchadnezzar resisted God's revelation. He resisted, or sought to resist, his own mortality. The image that he commissioned symbolised his desire that no kingdom should destroy his, including the kingdom of God.

Well, let's then consider, what was the purpose of him erecting this sort of massive image? The text reveals two purposes.

[8 : 51] Big Neb, even more massive need. More massive than the statue. His more massive need for personal approval and adoration.

There's also a very pragmatic reason. Look at verse 2. Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent for the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, and the counsellors, and the treasurers, and the justices, and the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to assemble and come to the dedication of the statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

You see, as well as his great need for adoration, he clearly wanted to focus attention and pride and to harness religious zeal and cultural diversity and do all of that, focus it on one king, one empire.

Notice there, just in verse 2, this has got a religious atmosphere to it, hasn't it? See the use of the word there? It was to be a dedication. And the listing of those various officials tells us that the king is pulling together the diverse kingdom.

This was a far-flung kingdom. And verse 5 gives us a picture of cultural diversity. Well, what's the catch then?

[10 : 13] Whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire. So, what do you reckon?

I mean, let's just simply bow down. I mean, let's just do it. I mean, it's not such a big deal to bow down. I mean, it's sort of grotesque, the statue, but let's just do it. Just bow down. And so, just like robots, that's exactly what the people did.

Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, the pipe, the lyre, the trigon, the harp, the drum, an entire musical ensemble, all the peoples, the nations and languages, fell down

and they worshipped the golden statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Robotic. You see, you turn the music on and you bow down. A robot swings into action when the power switches thrown. Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, the pipe, the lyre, the trigon, the harp, the drum, and the entire musical ensemble, all the peoples, the nations, the languages, they fell down, they worshipped the golden statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

And friends, the terrible reality is that those in the world around us who are not in personal relationship with Jesus Christ likewise behave like robots.

[11 : 33] Because in a figurative sense, in a metaphorical sense, when the symphony music of the kingdom of this world strikes up, what does the world do?

It bows down. And the worshippers on the plain of Jura worshipped the achievement of Big Neb. They were like robots. And Big Neb was overdosing on approval, on personal adoration. And the world that we live in worships the achievements of mankind.

And one commentator has rightly said, to worship the achievement of man actually makes the worshipper something less than human. You ever thought about that?

To worship the achievement of man, if we're to do that, actually makes us less than human. Verses 8 to 18. The boys big stand.

[12 : 37] I wonder if you remember how chapter 2 finished. Daniel made a request to the king and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon.

And just like we've come to know the king as, what's his name, Big Neb, well, we've come to know Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego affectionately as the boys.

Well, that's what I've called them. They're a little bit older than they were in chapter 2. Well, friends, it's not surprising that these three Jewish exiles who've been appointed to positions of such great importance in the Babylonian kingdom, it's not, it's not surprising that there would be lots of jealousy.

In verse 8. At this time, certain Chaldeans came forward. They denounced the Jews. They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, O king, live forever. You, O king, have made a decree that everyone who hears the sounds of the horn, the pipe, the lyre, the trigon, the harp, the drum, and the entire musical ensemble shall fall down and worship the golden statue.

And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire. There are certain Jews whom you've appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

[13 : 53] These pay no heed to you, O king. They do not serve your gods and they do not worship the golden statue that you've set up. You see, friends, the choice was very simple if you look at verse 6.

The choice was simply this, bow or burn. And scripture clearly teaches that a committed follower, a committed disciple of the Lord Jesus will come into conflict with the world.

not all of the time, but it is a certainty. That's what scripture says and experientially.

I've known that in my own life. But the boys, the three boys, they weren't actually looking for confrontation. As someone said in reading one of the commentaries, these were not martyr hunters. disciples. No, I mean, just imagine the scene if you can. Here they are, they're faithfully going about their duties and their responsibilities for the king. The ruling emperor of the world power.

[15 : 05] There was no running around beating their chest that they were followers of Yahweh. There was no histrionics. But these were faithful disciples. And they know that lines need to be drawn in the sand.

Remember that? They'd already done it. Back in chapter one, remember they drew that line? It didn't seem such a big deal at the time. It didn't seem to be a really big matter. But this is a big test. Because for them to bow down to this image, they'd be declaring to all that Yahweh was not their only Lord.

And the consequences of not bowing down were just extraordinarily clear. There was no need for them to go to the tanning studio.

You see, what awaited their civil disobedience was a furnace of blazing fire. If you think about it, the world around us always responds strongly against God's people taking a stand.

[16 : 24] Let me also say that even within the visible church, there's sometimes outcry when believers take a stand on Scripture. Amazing as that might sound.

Holding to absolutes provokes strong response by those who haven't turned from their self-centeredness, who haven't turned from their self-worship rebellion to the living God. The God described in this chapter as the most high God. The God who we've sung about tonight, the holy God. Friends, this chapter is about believers under pressure.

It's about where we draw that line, just as we saw in chapter one. The Holy Spirit is clearly emphasizing an important matter for all followers, for all followers of the Lord Jesus.

Now, verse 13, Nebuchadnezzar in a furious rage, he commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought in, so they brought those men before the king. He said to them, is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, that you do not serve my gods and you do not worship the golden statue that I've set up?

[17:39] Now, if you're ready when you hear the sound of the horn, the pipe, the lyre, the trigon, the harp, the drum, and the entire musical ensemble to fall down and worship the statue that I've made, well, well and good. But if you don't worship, you shall immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire, and who is the god that will deliver you out of my hands?

You see, Big Neb, he brings new definition to that little phrase, he threw a wobbly. I mean, the veins in this man's neck must have sort of stood out like tattooed lines, raised tattooed lines.

Outrage, I mean, how dare you not worship me? And like an addict, the king's heart, soul, mind, and strength have been taken over by the addiction of universal approval.

He doesn't receive it, so what's his response? a temper tantrum. This is not a temper tantrum just like throwing a few toys in the corner. And friends, you know, in our fallenness, the reality is we love adoration.

And in our fallenness, we often act badly when we're not adored. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego facing a furnace of unimaginable heat.

[19:19] When I left uni, I started work as a chemical engineer in a petrochemical plant down at Altona. And at the start of that production process, which is called steam cracking, there were these four massive furnaces that was part of the production unit that I looked after.

And ethane gas was passed through metal tubes that sort of like spaghetti went through this furnace. And so that ethane gas under just extreme temperature and with some water mixed would then be broken down into a range of hydrocarbons.

The heat of these furnaces was just absolutely intense. I mean, there were little peepholes and you need to sort of shield your face as you open this to see if there were any blockages in these tubes. The boys, the boys had drawn their line in the sand. And on one side of the line, the sand is white hot.

And Big Neb, he blurts out in his rage, who is the God that will deliver you out of my hands? the three Jewish exiles, they know the answer to the question.

[20:39] Look with me at verse 17. If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire and out of your hand, O King, let him deliver us. In fact, I think the NIV picks up the original Aramaic and the sense is very emphatic.

Our God is able to deliver us. They don't have any doubt that God can deliver a miracle. I mean, the Lord had done so many, many, many times in the history of the nation of Israel.

And friends, for us, there's no situation that we might face as followers of Jesus that is beyond our God. No situation.

He is absolutely able to deliver a miracle. If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire and out of your hand, O King, let him deliver us.

But if not, be it known to you, O King, that we will not serve your gods and we will not worship the golden statue that you've set up.

[21:51] I mean, these verses are the heart of chapter 3. I mean, what a model way to pray and what great theological truth. God knew that God was more than capable of delivering them physically, even without the slightest frown of their eyebrow.

God's But these three Jewish exiles, living in a foreign land, facing real, genuine, life-threatening hostility for their faith, they were willing to continue to serve God without a miracle.

You see, physical death for the boys was not the ultimate disaster. This was a perspective also of Martin Luther King Jr.

I don't know whether any of you saw the documentary last night on SBS. I was watching it for light relief after the synod. Martin Luther King trusted God.

He'd drawn a line in the sand and indeed the very night before he was assassinated, he spoke in a church service, of the very real prospect that his life might be cut short.

[23 : 16] And Martin Luther King ended that address, if you like, more of an address than a sermon, praising the Lord. I mean, it was just absolutely inspiring to watch that again.

Someone has described the faith of the three boys as simply this, but if not, faith. Do you get it? But if not faith.

What a great description. But if not, be it known to you, O King, that we shall not serve your gods and will not worship the golden statue that you've set up. And friends, that's what we all need.

We need but if not faith. faith that knows that God can and does intervene.

Faith that genuinely prays expectantly. And faith that also trusts so much in God's goodness that it never demands.

[24 : 25] And faith that doesn't fall apart when God's answer is no. Verses 19 to 25.

Gee, I mean, I thought there were only three. Nebuchadnezzar was so filled with rage against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that his face was distorted. He ordered the furnace heated up seven times more than was customary and he ordered some of the strongest guards in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and to throw them into the furnace of blazing fire.

See, the Babylonian leadership thought that the three mates would in an instant be dead. But the great reversal.

The three are alive. I mean, they're walking in the middle of the fire. I mean, certainly physically alive because of God's miraculous shielding of them in the fire.

But much more importantly, spiritually alive, they know their God. They know him personally. You see, it was actually the ones on the outside of the furnace who were dead.

[25 : 49] those worshipping a lifeless idol. They were already dead, dead to the one true living God.

And for us, for anyone here who is not in a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, we are dead if we're in that state. We're spiritually dead. dead. The Bible tells us that one day if we don't repent and turn around from that rebellion, we'll be eternally dead.

But the good news, the great news of the gospel is that for all, indeed for anyone who repents and trusts in Jesus as their Saviour and Lord, we share in Jesus' resurrection life now, and one day we will be literally and physically resurrected to spend all of eternity in the new heaven and the new earth with the most high God.

Well, big Neb's eyes are just rolling from side to side because not only are there three Jews alive, but verse 25, I see four men unbound, walking in the middle of the fire, and they're not hurt, and the fourth has the appearance of a God.

Was the fourth man an angel, or was the fourth an appearance of the pre-incarnate Christ, before the time that he came to earth and was born as Jesus of Nazareth?

[27 : 31] The reality is this side of glory we can't be sure. The text doesn't tell us explicitly, but whichever way, the bottom line is that God is with them.

He's there in the crisis, he's there beside them. And the writer to the Hebrews in the New Testament, he reminds suffering Christians, persecuted Christians in the first century of God's unbreakable promise.

Hebrews 13 we read, I will never leave you or forsake you. So let me just encourage you to just quickly reflect on last week.

Some of the things that I'm going to mention probably haven't happened in your last week. But let that truth sink in. Never will I leave you or forsake you. You see, for the Christian, the Lord has promised to be with us.

For example, when we're told that we might have a suspected tumour and we need an MRI scan. When we're feeling great stress with year 12 assessments and school and college exams.

[28 : 42] When we're waiting in a petrol queue on a Tuesday, you know, for that six cent reduction in the petrol price and you wait in the queue for 30 minutes or 40. Friends, indeed, it's in every aspect and every activity of life.

But that promise holds true. I will never leave you or forsake you. We're never truly alone. The Lord's always with us. And more than that, he's sovereign.

And he is in control. Life in this fallen world, the world in which we live, does bring its share of sadness, of difficulties, and indeed it brings those sort of in-your-face challenges to our walk with

Christ.

We all need that but-if-not-faith. That's what we need. Unshakeable trust in the most high God. verses 26 to 30. Has Big Neb now seen the light?

[29 : 59] And the satraps and the prefects and the governors and the king's counsellors gathered together and saw that the fire not had any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed, their tunics were not harmed, not even the smell of fire came from them.

Nebuchadnezzar said to them, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants who trusted in him. They disobeyed the king's command and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any God except their own God.

Therefore, I make this decree, any people, nation, or language that utters blasphemy against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other God who is able to deliver in this way.

So, question, has Big Neb seen the light? I mean, we kind of hoped that, didn't we, at the end of chapter two?

But we saw tonight that self-worship had consumed him. But now, at the close of chapter three, I mean, he's clearly impressed by the miracle.

[31 : 18] But look at verse 28. God is still remote from King Nebuchadnezzar. See, the king doesn't say, my God, rather, the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

And that reaction is true in our world. Friends and colleagues, associates of ours can be impressed by what they see of what God is doing in our lives.

Indeed, they can be impressed, if you like, by our but-if-not faith. However, some never come to a point of personally trusting in the Lord as their saviour.

I've got a close friend, well, maybe more than one, but I'm thinking of one in particular, who's impressed by how God has sustained us through the years of caring for our youngest child, for any visitors, a little boy, Brendan, with cerebral palsy.

He's quite impressed by it, and he sees God's provision in that. Do you know what my friend says to me? Rod, I do not want Jesus Christ to be the Lord of my life.

[32 : 35] impressed, but not bowing down to the Lord. There wasn't any spiritual change in the king.

He was still the one seeking to control everything. It was just this time he was protecting the Jews. Much still needed to happen for Nebuchadnezzar to be brought to a place of humility before God. So come back next week, and we look at that in chapter 4. Friends, as we close, what an absolutely awesome God, to use a word of Lisa.

We worship and serve all-powerful, all-knowing, and absolutely holy and jealous for his name. He won't put up with idolatry, and it doesn't matter whatever form that idolatry is in.

So if we've been convicted this night of our love of self, of a great need for the approval of others, we need to confess our sin and once again bow down before the Most High God, acknowledging him as our Saviour and the only Lord.

[34 : 00] God. Daniel 3 speaks strongly to us about not compromising with the world, regardless of direct or indirect pressure in our lives.

Daniel 3 again reminds us of the crucial need to know from the witness of God's Word and the Holy Spirit where we must draw those lines.

And friends, God, if you like, bellows into our 21st century ears for us to have but if not faith. Faith that knows that God can and that he does intervene. Faith that prays expectantly for him to do that. Faith that also trusts so much in God's goodness that it never demands.

And faith that doesn't fall apart when God's answer is no. Way to think about that as simply a Christian walk, totally submissive to our God.

[35 : 18] Amen.