

# Tested by Fire

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Preacher: Mark Chew

[ 0 : 00 ] Please turn back to Daniel chapter 3. I'll try to get you into the narrative another way. It should be an outline as well for you to follow along.

Now, as citizens of a democracy, we sometimes get our hopes up, don't we, when we see that there's a change in government or even, I don't know, where there's a change in premier. And we think that now perhaps life will get easier, that this change of government will bring with it better decision-making and better government.

But often it turns out to be temporary and false hope, doesn't it? Because leaders are human. Despite their promises, they don't live up to our expectations.

Well, if Daniel chapter 2, that was last week, was anything to go by, Daniel and his friends would have had cause for hope.

[ 1 : 03 ] After all, Daniel had just done what no other magician could and interpreted the king's dream for him. And at the end, the king even praised God, saying Daniel's God was the God of gods and the Lord of kings.

Surely, surely, Daniel and his friends could dare hope that the king would now worship their God. But sadly, no.

It seems the king was pleased because of what he heard. But I think all he heard was that he was the head of gold in that dream. And then it was almost as though he forgot the rest of it.

He forgot about the stone that was going to come from heaven to break the statue, including his head, the head of gold, into pieces and blowing everything away like chaff. He sort of reminds me of the person who gets really excited when they find out the good news of Jesus, gives them eternal life, and then forget that, well, they're meant to use this life to live for Jesus and not to go back to their old rebellious ways.

Well, here in chapter 3, we see how king, and I've been calling him King Nebi, or it was meant to be Mr. Neza, apparently, from VeggieTales. King Nebi responds to the dream soon after.

[ 2 : 27 ] He's enthralled by his own glory, isn't he, as the head of gold. And so he says, this is what he did, that king Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold 60 cubits high and 60 cubits wide, and set it up on the plain of Jura in the province of Babylon.

He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisors, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and all other provincial officials to come before the dedication of the image he had set up. So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisors, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

And they stood before it. So this entire image now is made of gold, not just the head. We don't know whether it's human, but it sits at 60 cubits.

That's 27 meters. So not quite as tall as some of the giant Buddhas that you might see around the world, but certainly taller than...

How many of you know Larry the Giant Lobster in Kingston, South Australia? Anyone? Yes. Here's a picture of Larry. There you go. The combi van under it.

[ 3 : 40 ] The one next to it is actually 18 meters high. It's actually the Goddess of Mercy, and it's actually also in South Australia, in Silex Hill.

Still, what we know now then is that the image is like the one from last week, isn't it? It's enormous. It's dazzling, because with gold, as the sun shines on it, it would have sparkled.

And because it was set in the plain of Dura, it would have been visible four miles around. And the word set up is actually used intentionally, because these are the very same words that Daniel used to describe God's eternal kingdom in the last chapter, and in reference to the stone.

In other words, whether this image, and we don't know whether it's an image of Nebi himself, human, or something else, this image is a direct rival to God's kingdom. The king demands allegiance to it, and therefore, as a consequence, to him as well. And so the king summons his satraps, prefects, governors, advisors, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and all the other provincial officials.

[ 4 : 52 ] I saw see them as his conga line of powerful yes-men coming to dance, who dutifully turn up, first to see dedicated for worship, and then, of course, to bow down.

But what the herald says is that it's not just, I wouldn't say it again, the satraps, prefects, blah, blah, blah. It's not just them, but every nation and all peoples that have to bow down as well.

And so the herald proclaims loudly, nations and peoples of every language, this is what you are commanded to do. As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe, and all kinds of music, 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.

Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, and all kinds of music, all the nations and peoples of every language fell down and worshiped the image of God, of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

So everyone does it, but it's not really spontaneous or voluntary worship, is it? It's almost like Pavlov's bell, if you know that psychological experiment.

[ 6 : 04 ] Or, what I thought of was the sound of the ice cream van. Remember this one? Now, who dares to admit to when they were young, immediately running out onto their streets whenever they heard the sound of this ice cream van?

Anyone? Sammy? Yes, good, you're a brave one. Bevan? Yes. Same culprits. Yep. But, that's almost like that, isn't it?

Because as soon as the sound of that music starts, whether it's the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe, or any kind of music, everyone had to sort of drop what they were doing and come out and bow down to this image of gold.

And can you imagine just how irritating that would be? Because you might be in the shower or something or preparing a meal or something, and then maybe Susan decides to play the piano. And then all of a sudden, oh, you have to stop. And you have to come out and you have to bow down. Next, your neighbor's daughter practices the violin and then you have to come up.

[ 7 : 33 ] And the TV turns on and a jingle comes on and you have to, every time there's music, you're compelled, aren't you, to come out and bow down to this image.

And of course, if you refuse, then there's the threat of being thrown into a blazing furnace. So much for wholehearted and joyful praise.

And for Daniel and his friends, this is actually doubly problematic because the Ten Commandments, which they, as Israel, submitted to, has as the following, the first two commandments, isn't it?

First, you shall have no other gods before me. And then secondly, you shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven or above or on the earth below or in the waters, on the earth beneath or in the waters below.

And as they were, you know, as they were sort of going through all this, they would be thinking, hey, what are we doing in Babylon in the first place? We're in exile, aren't we?

[ 8 : 38 ] We've actually broken these laws as a nation and that's what we're doing, you know, that's why we're here. God is actually chastising us. And so Daniel and his friends knew the danger of actually bowing down to this image and what it would do to their worship of God.

But worse than that, there were also astrologers who weren't happy, were they, with what Daniel had done to them. Daniel had made them look foolish last week, didn't he, by being able to interpret the dream when they could not.

And so they decide they're going to snitch on Daniel's friends, dob them in, verse 8. At this time, some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, may the king live forever.

Your Majesty has issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, fluid, zither, lyre, harp, pipe, and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace.

But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty.

[ 9 : 52 ] They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up. Now these guys are not dumb as well. They know from last week how easy the king's fury is stoked.

Just a whiff of disobedience and the king's anger is turned up a notch. And that was true. Verse 13, Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

So these men were brought before the king and he 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, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe, or Mr. Whippy ice cream van, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good.

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

And so the king really has now set up a contest, hasn't he, against his gods and the god of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

[ 11 : 01 ] And he's saying, if you don't worship my gods, well then, let yours prove that he's powerful enough to save you from me. And by the way, in case you forgot, do you remember who conquered you in Judah and brought you here, defeated, as prisoners of war?

So this was really a no-win situation for them, wasn't it? I think that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego would have been willing to just be quiet, you know, not criticize the king.

They didn't want to bow down, but they were happy to just lay low, not draw attention to themselves. But no, the king and the astrologers were not willing to leave them alone. And so now, their faith, their worship of God was being put to the test, wasn't it?

This was crunch time. And so they replied in verse 16, King Nebuchadnezzar, we don't need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it.

And he will deliver us from your majesty's hand. But, even if he does not, we want you to know your majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.

[ 12 : 17 ] And so, as I've said last week, faith was trusting in God even if we don't know what the outcome might be. And that's what they're doing here.

They trusted God to deliver them. They knew God could. They're not doubting his power, but neither are they presuming on it. And they're saying that even if God chooses not to, they will keep serving God.

They will not bow down to the king's idols. And so the king's fury now is really cranked up, isn't it? Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed.

He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace.

So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans, and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. And again, all these details really just spell out how furious the king really was.

[ 13 : 22 ] Not only was he turning up the heat, he wanted the fence tied up as tightly as he can. So not any old just, any soldier would do it. Just the, you know, he wants the strongest of them so that, you know, make sure those knots are really tight because you're so strong.

Tie them so that they cannot get out of it. And of course, left them fully dressed with all their thick clothing just so that they can really feel the heat.

And such was the king's mania that we read the king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

And so the king was willing to sacrifice even his strongest soldiers to get at these men. But then, immediately, a surprise because King Nebuchadnezzar leapt to his feet in amazement and asked his advisors, were there three men that tied, we tied up and threw in the fire?

They replied, certainly your majesty. He said, look, I see four men now walking around in the fire unbound and unharmed and the fourth looks like a son of the gods. And so Nebuchadnezzar approached the opening of the blazing furnace and, you know, here I'll say, majesty, just be careful.

[ 14 : 41 ] Don't get too close. You might burn yourself. And he shouted, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out. Come here. And so Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the fire and the satraps, prefects, governors, and royal advisors crowded around them.

They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed, their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them. Now, some people have said that this fourth man is the pre-incarnate Jesus himself.

The text really doesn't tell us. And I don't think that we need to go there because whoever this fourth person is, it's clearly someone that comes from God. He's the one who is delivering Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

That's the symbol of God's presence with them. And it is a direct answer, isn't it, to the king's earlier question. What God is able to rescue you from my hand? Well, there's the answer, isn't it?

The God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego can and has. And so, admitting defeat with the running score, I think now, if you go back to chapter 2, God of Israel 2, Nebuchadnezzar nil.

[ 15 : 59 ] That's where we are. He's losing. Nebuchadnezzar says, Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants.

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. Therefore, I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble.

But no other god can save in this way. Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon. So I think this is grudging praise forced out of the king, but it's praise nevertheless, isn't it?

And not only that, we see the faith of these men actually secure protection and relief for all the others who may wish to remain faithful to the God of Israel. because now the king decrees that no one is to rubbish their god or else they'll be cut into pieces and their houses turn to rubble.

This seems to be a favorite punishment of the king, judging from last week as well. But notice as well how the king identifies this king. He is the god of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

[ 17 : 24 ] Now in the rest of the Old Testament, when God is identified, is often called the god of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Of course, the king here doesn't know these Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or he may, but what he's unwittingly done by calling God the god of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego is to point out how personal God is.

God is the god of Daniel's forefathers, yes, but his relationship is also directly with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are known by God by name.

And God even showed it by being present with them, by sending his angel to be that fourth person in the furnace. He was with them in the very midst of the trial by fire, identifying with their audio.

And actually, as you look through the whole chapter, the names Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego appears 12 times as a sort of reinforcement to tell us actually these people are known. They have a name and God knows them. More times even than the Zithaliah, blah, blah, blah. More times even than the Setrach, Prefects, Governors, blah, blah, blah. 12 times it's said in this chapter, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

[ 18 : 48 ] And so likewise for us as Christians, God is also with us in our trials. But the focus of Daniel 3 is really the trials we face when our faith is being tested, when their faith is being tested, when their allegiance to God is being questioned and they're asked whether they will still stand up.

Not worship idols, but continue to worship God. And you know, for us, it may not be literally a fire that we're being forced into. It may not even be a physical idol that we need to bow down to.

But as Christians, as faithful followers of Jesus, we will see our faith tested in life one way or another. And whatever form it may take, there will be pressure and there will be temptation to give up on worshiping God and following Jesus.

It may be a severe illness that makes you doubt God's goodness. It may be a trial in terms of maybe singleness even or not being able to have a job or something that you want that may make you ask where God is.

Or it may be your colleagues or friends or family that suddenly or otherwise make you choose between God or them. and there may even be costly consequences if you don't like Daniel's friends.

[ 20 : 18 ] And whatever the exact situation might be, you will feel like you're in the fiery furnace just like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And often then the question that comes is this.

Why? Why does God make us go through these things? I mean, we've already committed to follow Jesus. We've signed up to being a Christian already.

You know, God knows that. Even when it's been costly, we said we were going to follow him. So why put us through more? Well, in our other reading tonight, in that reading from 1 Peter, the apostle writes this, doesn't he?

Praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade.

This inheritance is kept in heaven for you who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

[ 21 : 35 ] these have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith of greater worth than gold which perishes even though refined by fire may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus is revealed.

And so Peter makes it clear, isn't it, that even though we may already have new birth in Christ, he says that right at the start, we're saved, yet we are still to go through suffering and trials of many kinds.

but he also says that the aim of these trials is a good thing for us. Why? Because it's to prove the genuineness of our faith.

And just like fire purifies gold, the most precious of metals, trials purify and refine our faith. It strengthens us and it strengthens our faith.

It shows our faith to be the real thing because it stood the test of time and trials. You know, we often don't know how good something is until it's tested, isn't it?

[ 22 : 39 ] I've bought many umbrellas in my time, probably too many, and some of them look real fancy, right? But, they're actually rubbish.

Others, you know, they come with all sorts of guarantees and promises on the label. You know, tough, durable, even the name of the umbrella might be something like that, you know, tough broolly or something like that.

But the real test comes only when you take it out one day and have to use it in a fierce storm, isn't it? I think I've got a picture of, not sure where that is, Japanese typhoon or something.

That's when the quality, isn't it, of the umbrella is really tested. and you really know a genuine umbrella from an imposter. And, you know, I found one of those and my fear is that I'll, you know, leave it behind somewhere and forgot to take it home or something.

And that's the same with our faith, isn't it? The more it's tested, the more we know ourselves, it's proven and genuine nature. And yes, it's hard, but afterwards, and even during, even during through it, it brings us joy, doesn't it?

[ 23 : 57 ] Because then we know that our faith is the real thing and has withstood the trials against it. And then most of all, and I think this is the real thing that Peter talks about, just as with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, when our, the genuineness of our faith is proven, it brings praise to God, doesn't it?

As Peter says. Now, even if not in this age by those who do not believe, then certainly when Jesus is revealed at his coming. Because we are like that prize, that treasure, that gold that Jesus has given his all to redeem by his blood through his death on the cross.

We are the riches of his inheritance, the great bounty of his harvest. And all the rulers on that day, whether in heaven or on earth, will sing the praise of the Lord Jesus because no other God that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego has proven can save in this way.

Even kings like Nebuchadnezzar will have to admit that. And they will sing the praise of the Lord Jesus for his great salvation of us, which has then been sustained by him through the trials of life by the genuineness of our faith.

And so, friends, if you find yourself now in a time of testing, don't be discouraged or give up. But look at this as a good thing because it's worth it in the end.

[ 25 : 26 ] Your faith is being refined and tested and proved to be genuine. And then ultimately, it will bring great praise to the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for the gift of salvation in Christ Jesus. We thank you that it comes only through faith in him and that this faith is tested with trials to prove its genuineness. Help us to rejoice greatly in it so that all the world will one day praise your son when we persevere in serving him until the day of his coming. In the glorious name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.