

[2 : 56] And while I do get that, like it really strips this chapter from what it's ultimately about. Which is not a moral lesson on courage.

This chapter, do you love me? You don't have to like me, but you do have to love me. This chapter is about the two things you're never supposed to talk about.

Religion and politics. Welcome to Faith Family Church on Sunday morning, right? And so this is going to get a little uncomfortable this morning, but that's okay.

You've already said you love me. And the Bible says you have to. I would submit to you that if this message gets a little uncomfortable, it's probably, I hope so, it's the Bible, not the messenger.

Okay? At least I hope that's the case. So just be prepared. But I'm telling you, this is so incredibly important for us. And one of the things I will not shy away from here at Faith Family is making you think.

[3 : 56] I want you to think about your life, about the Bible, about the world in which we live. And chapters like this force us to think about challenging issues.

Are you with me? All right. So let's begin. I'm going to give it just a flavor of this chapter. As we read a few verses, I'll invite you to please stand as we honor the reading of God's Word.

And let's pick up in verse 1. Nebuchadnezzar makes an image of gold whose height was 60 cubits and its breadth was 6 cubits. And he set it up on the plain of Dora and the, not to be confused with the explorer.

Right? Anyways, that was a bad joke. Sorry. I won't use that next service. Plain of Dora and the province of Babylon. The king of Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather the satraps, the prefects, the governors, the counselors.

This is a literary way of saying essentially everybody in the official court to come and dedicate the image of king Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And then the satraps, the prefects, the governors, again, all of these government officials gathered together for the dedication of the image that king Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

[5 : 05] And they stood before the image. And a herald proclaimed aloud, you're commanded, O people's nations and languages, that when you hear the sound of the horn, the pipe, the lyre, the trigon, the harp, the bagpipe, all of these musical instruments, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that king Nebuchadnezzar has set up.

And if you don't, if you don't worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning, fiery furnace. Therefore, as soon as the people heard all the musical instruments, the peoples, the nations, the languages, they fell down, they worshiped the golden image that king Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Are we ready? Let's pray. Father, thank you for this time. Thank you for moments like this that will force us to think about our world, to think about our life in this world as we live by faith in you.

And I pray that you'd come and teach us this morning. And I pray it in Jesus' name. And God's people said, amen. You can be seated. It is one of the greatest trilogies ever written.

The books alone sold over 150 million copies, resulting in \$2.25 billion in sales. It was voted the book of the 20th century by Waterstones in the UK.

[6 : 24] It was named the nation's best loved novel by the BBC. And the movie series that was made off of the books, directed by Peter Jackson, grossed over \$3 billion in sales.

In fact, all three movies are ranked in the top 30 movies of all time. If you haven't guessed by now, and I'm sure some of you have, I'm referring to J.R. Tolkien's classic trilogy, The Lord of the Rings. And if you've ever read the books or if you've seen the movies, and I'm not sure you'll get into heaven if you haven't, right? That's a joke, right? I highly recommend that you do that because you know the story that runs throughout the whole thing is this long and difficult journey to destroy a ring.

That's what the whole thing is about, is destroying the ring. And why are they so much on a mission to destroy this ring? Well, here's why. It began with the forging of the Great Rings.

Three were given to the elves, immortal, wisest and fairest of all beings. Seven to the Dwarf Lords, great miners and craftsmen of the mountain halls.

[7 : 48] And nine, nine rings were gifted to the race of men who above all else desire power. For within these rings was bound the strength and will to govern each race.

But they were all of them deceived. For another ring was made. In the land of Mordor, in the fires of Mount Duke, the Dark Lord Sauron forged in secret a master ring to control all others.

And into this ring he poured his cruelty, his malice, and his will to dominate all life. One ring to rule them all.

So whoever has the ring has all of the power. As you just heard in that clip, one ring to rule them all. And that's why everybody throughout the whole story is obsessed.

I mean literally obsessed with this ring. Wars are fought over it. Hearts are deceived by it.

Relationships are divided by it. Everyone believes.

[8 : 58] Everybody's convinced. If power, if the ring were in the hands of the right person, namely myself, then everything would be right with the world.

And what Tolkien so profoundly illustrates is this point. Humanity, human beings, no matter their intentions, cannot be trusted with such power.

Are you with me? Now listen, Faith Family, we see Tolkien's example in that story played out all around us all the time.

Do we not? I mean for example, you see it on the global stage among world leaders as they position for power. It happens in our local communities throughout the U.S.

You see it in all kinds of relationship dynamics and power struggles. And it's not just people who are in powerful positions that struggle with this.

[10 : 01] I would submit that every single one of us struggles with this in some way, even small ways. Some of you love being the owner of your own company because it allows you to be in charge.

Some of you control the finances of your home. And you'd like to say it's because you're better with numbers. But the truth is there's a part of you that loves being in control.

Some of you like to run your own schedule. And why is that? It's because you want your life planned out your way. How many of you know someone or had that kid that absolutely loved to tell others what to do?

Right? Don't point. Okay? You know that person. Some of you are that person, right? And some of you would come up to me and you would say, But pastor, I'm not all that interested in power.

Yes, you are. Because even if you're not seeking power, you want your people to be in power.

Because if your people are in power, you feel more secure.

[11 : 09] Are you with me? Every single one of us, either in a big way or a small way, wants the ring. We want the ring. And have you ever stopped to ask why that's the case?

Listen to me. It's actually not for a bad reason. Yes, it gets expressed many times in bad ways. But there's actually a good reason why we want that.

And it's because human beings, listen to me. This is so important for us to understand Daniel 3. Human beings were created in God's image to rule.

We were created in God's good design to rule over things. Now, where would I get that kind of idea from? Page one of your Bible.

You don't have to turn very far because just a few verses into the Bible, you see this. God said, let us make human beings in our image and after our likeness and let them have, say it, dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the livestock.

[12 : 18] God created man in his image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. He blessed them. And God said to them, be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and say it.

Subdue it and have, one more time, dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, and everything that moves on the earth. In other words, listen, we were created in God's image to have dominion.

Now, in our Western Christian mindset, the way that we're often taught about the image of God is that the image of God is what separates us from animals.

So they'll say things like, what it means to be in the image of God is that we're rational beings. I don't know about you, but I know some dogs that are smarter than some human beings. Amen?

Okay? And all God's people said? Yeah, some of you have one, right? So, or we'll say, no, no, what it means to be in the image of God is we're relational, like God is relational.

[13 : 19] I'm not suggesting that those things aren't true. What I'm saying is that is not what Genesis is about. Being relational or rational isn't anywhere on the radar in Genesis 1.

Rather, what is true in Genesis 1 is that God, watch, God takes and he creates and he multiplies and he brings about creation. And then he creates humanity in his image.

His image bears to do what? To take the creation and do what he did. Work it, fill it, and then rule over it in a way that displays the goodness and glory of God.

That's what it means to be God's image bearers. Now, what happens in Genesis 3? Human beings decide we don't want to rule in a way that images God.

We want to rule in a way that images us. We want to rule in a way that demonstrates self, not the glory of God.

[14:23] In other words, what happens in Genesis 3 is they want the ring. They want the ring for themselves. And what happens is if you wear the ring long enough, it begins to consume you.

Do you know who I am? No, I can't say that I do. I don't know how to put this, but I'm kind of a big deal.

Really? People know me. I'm very happy for you. I'm very important. I have many leather-bound books and my apartment smells of rich mahogany.

You know this, right? I mean, we're doing that in a comedic way, but isn't that so true? Like what happens is you wear the ring long enough and you begin to think, you know, I'm kind of a big deal. You think, for example, you're a store manager at Walmart. And you manage the store and you do it in a way, at the beginning, in a way that's been entrusted to you.

[15:27] What you care about is you care about your customer and you care about your employees and that's really what matters to you. But then you have a little bit of success.

And you begin to think, wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute. I should be running lots of Walmarts, right? And you begin to become more concerned about the profit than you do the customer or you do the employee.

Are you with me? Is this not like real life every day? And then it doesn't just happen at work. It carries over to you at home where you expect everybody there to fall in line.

After all, you're the boss. No more Will Ferrell, okay? So those examples are meant to show you. And again, it's through comedy.

But isn't that true? What happens in so many ways in life, and we see it all the time, and what human history has taught us is this.

[16:25] Absolute power corrupts absolutely. And now that we have that kind of understanding, and I really wanted to take the time to really unpack that because you need that foundation to actually understand what's happening here in Daniel chapter 3.

Because this is now on full display here in Babylon. Look at verse 1. Verse 2. Everybody with me.

Are you with me this morning? Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 3 builds an image. Do you see why I've taken the time this morning to give you a biblical foundation of image?

Nebuchadnezzar builds an image, and this image is like 90 feet high. So think nine basketball goals high. This is a really tall image.

[17:58] Now what is this image of? We don't know. The text actually doesn't say. It just says repeatedly the image that Nebuchadnezzar set up.

What we do know, even though we don't know what the image is, what we do know is what the image represents. Faith family, what is this image made of? Say it.

Gold. Does that sound familiar to you? Were you here last week? Did you read chapter 2? You see, if you weren't reading Daniel in little chunks, and you were reading it continuously, you would have literally just read these verses.

This is how chapter 2 comes to an end. This was the dream. And now I'm going to tell you the interpretation. You, O king, the king of kings, to whom God, the God of heaven, has given the kingdom.

That is, you're the most powerful man on the planet, but this authority that you've been given has been given to you by God. The power, the might, the glory, into whose hands he has given.

[19:03] Wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field, the birds of heaven. Do you see this Genesis language? Right? You're an image of God that was given authority by God to display God, making you rule over them.

You are the head of, say it, gold. Now connect the dots. Connect the dots. Daniel interprets a dream to tell Nebuchadnezzar, your kingdom is temporary.

The authority that you have comes from God, and you're just an image of God that exists to use your authority for God. And all Nebuchadnezzar hears is that he and Babylon are the head of gold.

So what does Nebuchadnezzar do? He builds an image. And the image is not of gold, silver, bronze, and iron like what was in the dream.

He builds an image that's all gold. Are you with me? Are you with me? In other words, stop me if you have heard this story before. Nebuchadnezzar takes the image of God and makes it an image of self.

[20 : 22] It's Genesis 3 all over again. Nebuchadnezzar is doing what Adam did. He's an image bearer who has been given authority, and he's to use that authority to display the glory of God.

But he doesn't do that. He builds an image to self. He builds an image to display his power and his authority. And if you want more proof, look at verse 12.

Verse 12 says, There are certain Jews whom you've appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, pay no attention to you.

See? What they're doing when they're not bowing is they're not honoring the king. Because they don't serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.

In other words, Nebuchadnezzar has built an image displaying his own glory. Now, first of all, in the ancient world, I need you to understand the ancient mindset here.

[21 : 28] In the ancient world, nations did this all the time. They would put up statues or images that would display their national identity as well as their cultural deities.

This was a very common thing to do. These statues, these images, reflected the nation and what the nation worshipped. In fact, that's why we were created in the image of God.

Namely, to represent God and to display God, to worship God. It's why there's so much. If you knew how much I was leaving out of this sermon, because there's so much here.

Are you still with me? Okay? God tells Israel, do not make an image of me. Why? Because I already made one.

It's you. I don't want you to be like all the other nations that put up these images, these statues.

You're my image. I've already put forth an image when I created you in my image.

[22 : 32] And so what was such a common place in these ancient nations was putting up these statues or images to display their identity and their deity.

Take, for example, this one. The Colossus of Rhodes. It was one of the first islands that you would come to as you were crossing the Mediterranean into Greece. This is actually an image of the god Helios, which was the Greek sun god.

And it represented Greece, and it represented what the Greeks worshipped. And so my point is that this was a very common thing in the ancient world.

However, today it doesn't happen as often. We don't have monuments that embody our national identity or reveal what we worship most.

We're not asked to pledge allegiance. Now, before you throw things at me, I'm not saying this is bad. I'm not saying this is good.

[23 : 41] All I'm saying is it still happens today. Are you with me? And this raises an uncomfortable question.

And I don't care. I want to push you a little bit. I love you. You have to love me, right? This raises a question Christians have to deal with.

You have to deal with this as exiles in Babylon. And here's the question. What happens when national identity becomes spiritual idolatry?

You still with me? What happens when national identity becomes spiritual idolatry? Or let me ask it a different way. How do we know when our patriotism has become paganism?

Preach, preacher. You probably won't say that to me. I'll say that. Preach, preacher. How do we know when patriotism becomes paganism? Well, there's a couple of indicators here in the text.

[24 : 46] Look at verse 10. You, O king, have made a decree that every man who hears all of these musical instruments shall fall down and worship the golden image. And whoever does not will be cast into the burning fiery furnace.

And there's these certain Jews that you've appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, they pay no attention to you. They don't serve your gods or worship.

Underline that word. The golden image that you have set up. And Nebuchadnezzar was furious with rage. He commanded Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to be brought. Brought these men to the king.

And he answered them and said, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you don't serve my gods or worship the golden image that I've set up? Now, if you're ready, I'm going to give you a second chance. When you hear the sound of all this musical instrument, you're to fall down and worship the image that I have made.

And if you don't, you will be immediately cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god that will deliver you out of my hands? Here's the first sign.

[25 : 50] Notice the king's demand for loyalty. In Nebuchadnezzar's mind, there is no separation between church and state.

In Nebuchadnezzar's mind, listen to me, the worship of Babylonian gods and loyalty to Babylon are the same thing.

Are you with me? What it means to be a Babylonian is to worship the Babylonian gods. They're the same thing.

In fact, notice that Nebuchadnezzar calls them by their Babylonian names in verse 12. And then he gives them a second chance to bow in verse 15.

Because what he's essentially saying is, good Babylonians bow. You do remember your name, right? You're Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

[26 : 47] You are Babylonians now. And what it means to be a good Babylonian is get on your knees and bow before this image. Are you with me? In other words, there was no difference between patriotism and praise.

In fact, patriotism was praise to a false god. Do you love me? Do you love me? We'll see, all right? Take for example. I mean, we have seen this happen in so many different ways throughout human history. Think, for example, of this one. Baldor von Schirok joined the Nazi party when he was 18 years old.

Within eight years, he became the architect of Hitler's youth program. He was so successful that he was elevated to the Secretary of State and became the close counselor of Adolf Hitler.

He did an interview with the London Times right before World War II broke out. And I want you to listen to this quote because it is chilling.

[27 : 55] Quote, One cannot be a good German and at the same time deny God. Faith in the eternal German is at the same time faith in the eternal God.

If we act as true Germans, we act according to the laws of God. And notice how the quote ends. Whoever serves Adolf Hitler serves Germany.

And whoever serves Germany serves God. That's dangerous. That's dangerous.

And that is exactly what's happening in Daniel 3. And the danger of giving you that example, even though it is historically true and textually accurate, is that you will see it as extreme, and in one sense it is.

But I would argue there are lesser forms of that that happen all the time. You have to love me. You have to love me. Faith family, if you have one of these in your home, please throw it away.

[29 : 11] Please, I beg you, throw it away. Do not misunderstand my heart here. Be patriotic. I'm very, very patriotic. Be patriotic.

Love your country. Wave the red, white, and blue. But do not equate the kingdom of God with the kingdom of man. Because the kingdom of man is not the kingdom of God.

And once you begin to blur those lines, you're in Babylon. Because it's precisely what's happening here.

Listen, I've told you this so many times. Our citizenship as Christians is in heaven, not in Washington. So love this country.

Love this country. But worship God. And God alone. I'll say it this way. I'll say it. Yeah, three of you are with me. Okay. Okay.

[30 : 10] At least a few of you still love me. All right. Listen, let your faith inform your politics. But don't let your faith be your politics. Your faith should inform your politics.

Absolutely. Your faith should inform everything. But your politics is not your faith. You can't blur those lines.

I wish I had more time to do a little church history lesson here. Because Daniel 3 was actually a very important passage. One of the early Christian thinkers by the name of Augustine wrote a book called The City of God.

Where he worked through this very issue. And how to understand, listen, our dual citizenship as Christians. How we are on one hand citizens of a nation.

But we are ultimately pledged allegiance to the kingdom of God. That is where our ultimate citizenship lies. Now, how far does this demand for loyalty go in Babylon?

[31 : 13] Are you still with me? Could this be any more relevant to where we're at today? Look what happens in verse 15. Now, if you're ready when you hear the sound of all these musical instruments that you fall down and worship the image that I have made.

And if you do not, you shall immediately be cast into a burning, fiery furnace. And who is the God that will deliver you out of my hands? Here's the second indicator. It's not only the king's demand of loyalty, but the king's view of humanity.

If you've zoned out, what do you do? I don't know how you could zone out of this message, right? But listen, stop me if this sounds familiar. How does a group of people who are obsessed with a human kingdom respond when someone comes along and doesn't bow down to their political ideology?

You destroy them. You cancel them. Who needs a furnace as long as you can get them fired? Notice how far Nebuchadnezzar is willing to take his political agenda. Verse 22. But the king's order was urgent and the furnace overheated and the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

[32 : 50] Are you listening, Faith Family? King Nebuchadnezzar was willing to dispose of human life as long as it accomplished his agenda. He didn't even care that it killed his own guards.

And I know, Faith Family, that you have the ability to discern this in our world today. Are you with me? Listen to, I may read this twice.

Listen to this. From the extremes of Nazi Germany, to modern day cancel culture, to the abortion movement, all the way to the inability to disagree on politics without wanting the other person destroyed.

Human life is easily disposed of.

Human life is easily disposed of. When you care more about the kingdom of man than you do the kingdom of God.

[34 : 18] Because at that point, listen to me. Human beings are no longer images of God. Human beings are obstacles to your agenda. Human beings are not visible. and you can justify whatever you want when you believe that.

Augustine said it this way in the city of God, the city of God is where we walk on gold and love people. The city of man is where we love gold and walk on people.

And all God's people said, amen. Are you with me? I told you it was going to get uncomfortable. Could Daniel 3 be any more relevant to our day?

It's not a children's story on courage and bravery. I mean, that's in the text, but it's not the main point. The main point here is a serious reminder for Christians living in exile to do this.

Be careful not to let your patriotism become paganism by offering praise to the wrong gods.

[35 : 38] You with me? Well, how do they respond? How do Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego respond to this? Verse 16. They answered the king and they said, 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.

Now, this might be the politest rebellion ever. Right? They resist. They rebel, and they do it in a polite way.

They do not march to the plain of Dora with signs that say God hates Babylonian idols. That is not their response. Their resistance, listen, faith family, Their resistance is non-participation in national idolatry.

Let me say it again. Their resistance was not, we're going to fight you Babylonians, and we're going to, we're going to, no, it's, we're just not going to bow. We will not participate in the worship of Babylonian gods.

[36 : 58] By non-participation, I do not mean withdrawal. They don't, like, you know, put a tent outside of Babylon and live there all by themselves.

Listen, what do these men do for a living? Look at how chapter 2 ends. Daniel made a request of the king and appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon.

Listen, these men have government jobs. Are you with me? They work for Babylon. In other words, they're fully engaged.

They serve the king. They want to make Babylon the best place they can make it. Listen to me. I need you to lean in here. Listen, they want to go back to Jerusalem in the same way I want to go to New Jerusalem.

I long. Sorry if I offend you. America is not my home. The kingdom of God is my home. Where I want to be for all of eternity is in the presence of God.

[38 : 06] And so you have Jerusalem. You have Jerusalem that's put up against this biblical metaphor of New Jerusalem, of the kingdom of God that is coming one day.

They want to be back in Jerusalem. I want to be in New Jerusalem. But for the time being, I'm here. And if I'm here, that means I'm fully engaged in the well-being of Babylon.

I just won't worship your gods. You've got to understand that as an exile, there are things I will do and there are things I will not do.

What I will do is I will learn your literature and I will speak your language and I will live among you and I will serve you and I will love this nation to the best that I can. I will do the best I can to make it the best nation it can be.

Are you with me? In fact, in Jeremiah, oh, I'm beginning to preach here. Jeremiah, the prophet who prophesied during this same time of the Babylonian exile, there were false prophets telling Israel, get out of Babylon, withdraw, live separately.

[39 : 21] And Jeremiah writes this in Jeremiah 29 verse 4. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all of the, say it, exiles whom I have sent into exile.

You are not where you are by accident. You are where you are because I sent you there from Jerusalem to Babylon.

And here's what I want you to do. Build houses. Live in them. Plant gardens. Eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters. Take wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage that they may bear sons and daughters.

Come on. I spent so much time earlier unpacking this. Multiply there. That's Genesis language. Multiply and don't decree.

Be fruitful and multiply. Take the things that you've been given. Cultivate them. Build them. Make this a great place. Fill it and do it for the glory of God.

[40 : 21] In other words, while everyone in Babylon is worshiping the image, why don't you be the image? Everybody in Babylon is bowing to Babylonian gods.

How about you reflect the glory of the true God? And you do this by making this place the best place it can be. Are you with me? Oh, I don't know if I have enough energy for another sermon. Yeah, I will. I will. I will. Those are things we will do, and we will do them gladly. But there are things we will not do. We will not eat your food, chapter 1, because it violates the dietary laws that God gave the people of Israel.

And we will not bow to your gods because God specifically said we're to have no other gods before him. In other words, Nebuchadnezzar, here is our response. We will love this country, but we will only bow to Christ.

We will love this country, but we will only bow to Christ. And if that means you need to throw us in a furnace, if that means you need to put us in jail, if that means you need to fire us from our jobs, if that means you need to cancel us on Twitter, God will either deliver us or he won't.

[41 : 44] But here we stand and we will do no other. That's the resistance that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego give to the king.

And it shows us how faith, what faith looks like as exiles. And we'll wrap this up and be done, all right? First, is notice that their faith focused on an object, not an outcome.

Did you see that? There's no name it and claim it here. Oh, I just know God's going to deliver us. I just know God's going to heal me.

I just know God is going to fill in the blank. Listen, faith family, notice this on the screen. Faith is trusting God, not testing God. It's very important that you understand that.

Because a lot of Christians talk like they're testing, I just know. No, you don't. No, you don't. What Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego say is, I know that God is able to deliver me.

[42 : 56] But even if he doesn't. Because my faith is grounded in a person, not an outcome.

That's what true faith is. Secondly, faith will be tested by fire. Faith will be tested by fire. Now, in their case, it was literal fire.

Obviously, they're thrown into a literal fiery furnace. But notice how Peter puts this. I wonder if Peter is not reflecting on Daniel 3 when he says this. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while if necessary, you've been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your what? Faith. More precious than gold, that perishes though it's tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Here it is, faith family. It's better to have a faith of gold than bow to an image of gold. Everybody in Babylon is bowing to an image of gold.

[44 : 00] Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego have a faith of gold. They have a faith of gold because it's tested by fire. And I assure you, faith family, life in Babylon will test your faith.

Amen? Are you with me? Lastly, faith perseveres to the other side. Faith perseveres to the other side. You remember how chapter 2 ends in Nebuchadnezzar's response to the interpretation of the dream?

I look at it in verse 47. The king answered and said to Daniel, Truly your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and the revealer of mysteries. And you would think, oh wow, Nebuchadnezzar, he gets it.

Right? He like wises up and finally comes to his senses about who God is. Until you turn the page. And what's Nebuchadnezzar doing?

In the very next page, chapter 3, he's building an image to himself. See? Here's something we have to understand about faith. Right? Notice it on the screen. Faith is not a temporary response to a momentary miracle.

[45 : 17] It's just not. It happens all the time in the Gospels. A miracle happens and it's like, oh, we believe until we don't. But contrast that with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, verse 26.

Then Nebuchadnezzar came near the door of the burning fiery furnace and he declared, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out. Come out here. And Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the fire.

You see, they got to the other side. They came out of the fire. They persevered the fire. And honestly, chapters 1, 2, and 3 is persevering one thing after another.

But true faith, Jesus teaches this in the parable of the soils. There is a momentary response that may look good externally but eventually gets choked out, Nebuchadnezzar, or there is an ongoing response that perseveres to the end.

That is saving faith. Faith is focused on an object, not an outcome. It is purified and tested by fire, and it perseveres to the end.

[46 : 29] And who is the one that gets them through the fire? Who is the one that gets us through the fire? Verse 24, we're almost done. King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose in haste.

He declared to his counselor, Did not we cast three men in the fire? And he answered to the king and said, True king. And 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. Did God deliver them from the fire?

In one sense, no, he didn't. They still were thrown in. In another sense, they were delivered. That is, they got through. How did they get through?

By this fourth person, this fourth image. The Hebrew, the idea here is the, actually Aramaic, is son of a divine being.

[47 : 33] In other words, what they're essentially saying is, I see a fourth one in the fire, like a divine being. Most scholars, I'm sure you've heard it taught, this is likely an Old Testament manifestation of Jesus.

Whether that's what's happening here or not doesn't change the point. Here's the ultimate point. God gets them through the fire because he is with them in the fire.

Do you hear that? Because some of you are in the fire right now. And God is with you.

He may not promise you an outcome, but he will promise you his presence. He will be with you to the end.

Amen? Amen. Amen. So how does the story end and we're done? Verse 29. Therefore I make a decree, any people, nation, language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be torn limb from limb.

[48 : 48] Oh, Nebuchadnezzar. Try caffeinated coffee. Seriously. And their houses laid in ruins. For there is no God who is able to rescue in this way.

I know you think maybe Nebuchadnezzar gets it here. He doesn't get it here. Nebuchadnezzar doesn't say, Yahweh is God. What he does is what was very common in the ancient world. We'll add Yahweh to our list of gods. So here's a new decree. Don't mess with these boys. Something's going on with them.

I don't know what it is. I can't explain what just happened. But something's going on. So if you touch them, I kill you. In other words, you get to the end of chapter 3 and Nebuchadnezzar still can't take off the ring.

He's still obsessed with the kingdom of man. Is this a children's story?

[50 : 02] Not at all. It's an expose. In Tolkien's illustration of the Lord of the Rings. That power in the hands of sinful human beings can't be trusted.

And that faith family raises one final question. Are you with me? If those who were made in the image of God to rule cannot be trusted, who can be?

And the answer is the true image of God. Colossians 1. Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

For by Him all things were created. That is, He rules over all things in heaven and on earth. Visible and invisible, whether thrones, dominions, rulers, or authorities.

All things were created through Him and for Him. Faith family, our hope is not in fallen images that run our nation.

[51 : 15] Our hope is in the true image of God who rules the world. And how does Jesus rule?

Keep reading. Verse 19. For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His, say it, cross.

I'm done. Listen. Jesus demonstrated His kingdom by entering the furnace for us. He allowed Himself to be consumed by the fires of human evil and crucified by a human kingdom.

And on the third day, just like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, He was delivered. Declaring victory over the kingdoms of this world.

And one day, Jesus will return. And He will rule forever and ever and ever. After all, this is so important.

[52 : 36] How did the battle for power get resolved in the Lord of the Rings? It wasn't through the destruction of power.

It was through power in the hands of the right man. The return of the king.

And on that day, we will do what we will not do here in Babylon. We will bow our knee.

And we will confess with our mouths. Jesus Christ is Lord. And all God's people said, Amen.

Let's pray together. Father, Father, thank You. Thank You for this time together this morning. To give us a moment to think about our faith.

[53 : 42] To think about our calling in the world. To think about who we are as followers of Jesus. And how that works with being a citizen of a nation.

And I pray this morning what would be clear is that there is only one true image of God who can rule perfectly. And His name is Jesus.

And we are to be conformed into His image. And I pray this morning as we come to a time of remembrance and communion.

That we would set our minds on what the kingdom looks like. A crucified man. Who makes peace through blood.

The blood of His own life. On a cross. That's our King. And this is Your kingdom.

[54 : 51] In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Amen.

Thank you.