

God Alone Can Save

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- [0 : 00] Good morning, Maranatha Baptist Church. Good morning. It is a privilege to worship with you and to have been worshiping now for two months.
- ! If we haven't met yet, my name is Luke Fawcett. My wife is Jana, and I guess it's your left back. So talk to her and us after the service. If we haven't met you guys, we'd love to do that.
- I just graduated from Cedarville just literally three months ago with my undergrad and my master's in Bible and got the privilege to meet Andrew in October and then come on as a pastoral intern just a couple months ago.
- I've been serving in that capacity. This morning we'll be continuing our study in Daniel chapter 3, focusing on verses 19 to 30. So if you have your Bibles, you can open to Daniel chapter 3, verses 19 to 30.
- If you're using a Bible in the pew, that's page 740. If you could have a superpower, what would it be?
- [1 : 15] Maybe you'd choose super strength or flying, maybe invisibility or reading people's minds, which is kind of weird. I remember as a young boy being awed by Spider-Man.
- I thought he was the coolest thing. I had the Spider-Man sneakers that lit up, and I wore the costume, his suit on Halloween. When I put that suit on, I felt absolutely invincible, like I could do anything.
- Parents, you know what this is like when your child has a little too much courage for their own good? That was me. We live in an age of superheroism. Just consider the phenomenon of the Marvel Universe.
- Many of you no doubt have watched these movies. In fact, all three movies in the Avengers trilogy are ranked in the top 10 highest grossing films in modern history.
- They've made over \$6 billion. It's undeniable that we live in a culture that glorifies superheroes.
- [2 : 25] But what does a superhero do for us? Why are we so fascinated by their powers and their mission? I think we can't get enough of superheroes because we know that we need saving.
- We know deep down that there's something wrong in our lives. The curse has had its way in different ways, and we long for deliverance.
- We want someone to take away the difficulties that we face, the car needing constant repair, the relational tensions that we feel, the frustrations at our workplace, the life-altering decisions, the shape of our body, the friendships that disappoint, and on and on it goes.
- Each of us longs for deliverance from something. We long for deliverance from something. So what is that for you?
- What do you long for deliverance from? See, the truth is that we will serve whatever we believe will save us.

- [3 : 36] We will serve whatever we believe will save us, whatever delivers us from the thing that we fear. The message this morning is titled that God alone can save.
- God alone is our deliverer. It functions something like a part two to what Andrew preached last week as part one. Part one focused on God's, or God alone is worthy of worship.
- The golden image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up for all the peoples and nations and languages to bow down to set the stage for three Hebrew boys who refuse him and bring about a conflict.
- And it's a conflict not primarily between the three Hebrews and Nebuchadnezzar. It's actually a conflict between Nebuchadnezzar and the God of heaven. This is a showdown of sovereigns.
- Who is gonna come out on top? Who is in power? Who is in control? And verse 15 sets the stage for our text. Nebuchadnezzar asked in chapter three, verse 15, who is the God who will deliver you out of my hands?
- [4 : 51] Who is the God who will deliver you out of my hands? We'll see that the singular message of chapter three, because it really is one message for one chapter, is that God alone deserves worship because God alone can save.
- God alone deserves worship because God alone is our deliverer. So the main idea for this morning is serve God who alone can save.
- Serve God who alone can save. Now it's important to note up front before we get into our passage that each point of this message is marked in our text with the transition word then.
- So you can see this in verse 19, verse 24, and verse 26. And Daniel writes this in a way that sets up three scenes for us, three things that make us ask the question, what happens next?
- As the narrative kind of twists and turns, as Nebuchadnezzar rises and falls, Shadrach are in and out of the fire, we're asking the question, what is going to happen?
- [6 : 05] So point number one, Nebuchadnezzar commands the Hebrews' death. Nebuchadnezzar commands the Hebrews' death. Follow along with me in verse 19 to verse 23.
- Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated.
- He ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and to cast them into the burning, fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning, fiery furnace.
- Because the king's order was urgent and the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning, fiery furnace.
- After Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are given a second chance to recant and to worship this golden image, the king's rage is fuming.
- [7 : 21] Notice the way it's described, though. It says Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the expression of his face was changed. We know from previous narratives that this is the typical way that Nebuchadnezzar responds when he doesn't get what he wants.
- Look back to chapter two, verse 12. Because of this, that is the Chaldean's inability to tell him his dream, the king was angry and very furious, and he commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be destroyed.
- Or just a few verses ago in chapter three, verse 13, that Nebuchadnezzar, in a furious rage, commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought.

He's done trying to reason with these Hebrews. Nebuchadnezzar will not tolerate rebellion, and his face starts to show what's in his heart.

He embodies the kind of worldly anger that James 4, 2 talks about, that we desire and we do not have, and so we murder. Parents, maybe you've heard your child say that you have the face, or that glare.

[8 : 36] It's the look that you give when your child rebels, and they know that if they don't do something, there's gonna be consequences. Literally, the expression of your face changes.

The picture here actually reminds me of something like the figure from, or the figure anger from Inside Out. Maybe some of you guys have watched this movie. It's directed from a young girl's life, and it's through her emotions that we actually see the movie play out, anger being one of them.

He's personified as this big, bright, no-nonsense, stubby emotion that always gets grumpy, and he's just in for a fight.

And there's one scene where Riley, the girl, comes home after a rough day of work and starts to get into it with her dad, and things start to heat up. Anger, you can literally see him clenching his fists, and his teeth start to grit, and his jaw gets harder, and the other emotions are like trying to calm him down because he's gonna absolutely lose it.

But finally, he just explodes, and fire comes out of his head, and he takes control of the situation. He's had it. Like anger, Nebuchadnezzar in our story is trying to take control of the situation through his anger.

[9 : 58] He's gonna show who's in charge. He's gonna show whose will is final. And first, we notice that he orders the furnace to be heated seven times more than it was.

Now, at face value, this just seems like Nebuchadnezzar is just heating up the furnace, right? He wants it to be hotter. But in Scripture, seven has a particular significance as a number.

It carries the idea of completion or fulfillment. You might remember that God rested on the seventh day of creation, marking its completion.

Or Elisha telling Naaman that he had to go wash in the Jordan seven times in order to be completely healed. Or Joshua and the Israelites going around Jericho for seven days and on the seventh time, going around seven times, marking the completion of its destruction.

This symbolic significance is similar to how the number three kind of functions in English. Students, if you've taken speech or rhetoric, you know that generally, in a persuasive argument, you have to have three points.

[11 : 06] Why is that? It's just because it's a number of completion. It marks something that's memorable and substantial. So to heat up the furnace seven times hotter is not just to make it hot, but to make it as hot as possible.

It does not matter whether or not it's seven times or 70 times. Nebuchadnezzar wants to incinerate these men. But why does he increase the heat at all?

Think about this for a moment. The furnace was literally built to kill anyone that didn't do what Nebuchadnezzar said. He could have just thrown them into the furnace and they would have died.

That's pretty simple. But I think here's why. Anger is power. Anger is power.

We know this is true in our own lives. When we raise our voice. When we speak brutal, cutting, divisive words.

[12 : 12] When we use our hands to hurt people. When we turn away in our bodies. It communicates that I'll show you how much I can hurt, manipulate, and control you.

That's the heart of sinful anger. And Nebuchadnezzar's actions are revealing his heart. That he is completely opposed not only to the Hebrews, but also to their God.

And we know from previous chapters that Nebuchadnezzar is basically opposed to God. It may not seem as messy right now, but it's still there. In chapter one, he took the temple vessels and defiled them by taking them into his own house of worship.

And as the story progresses, he's happy if God helps him. Right? He's happy if God gives him wise, capable counselors. Or if God reveals his dreams that are troubling him.

And we might even be fooled into thinking that Nebuchadnezzar at this point believes based on his blessing from chapter two. But faith or acceptance is easy when God is working for me.

[13 : 29] When God serves me. What about when God is opposed to what I'm doing? What about when God's commands oppose my self-centered desires and demands?

You see, faith is not tested through what God offers me. Who wouldn't want eternal life? Who would not want joy and peace? Faith is not tested through what God offers me, but through what I am willing to submit to him.

If God doesn't own every area of my life, then I have not surrendered to him as Lord in that way. And I am still in the center.

And anger is often the way that reveals and exposes who is at the center of our lives. The second way that Nebuchadnezzar tries to show his power is by ordering his personal guards to bind and cast Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the furnace.

He orders the men to be thrown in. Even though the Hebrews have been compliant and peaceful up to this point, Nebuchadnezzar will not stand it.

[14 : 44] He's going to treat them as rebels. They've been faithful wise men, but he treats them as criminals. And the word that's actually translated here in verse 20, for mighty men, he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind them.

This word is also translated elsewhere as most mighty men in the KJV or strongest soldiers in the NIV. And I actually think the NASB, the New American Standard Version, seems to render it best as valiant warriors.

This is actually significant because it's the same word that is used to describe David's best soldiers. King David, if you remember, had soldiers like Abishai, who killed 300 men in a day.

Or Benaiah, who went into a snowy pit to kill a lion. These, in other words, are the best, the SEAL Team 6 of Nebuchadnezzar's army.

So when Nebuchadnezzar commands his valiant warriors to bind and throw these men into the fiery furnace, he's making a statement. He's saying that I am on top.

[15 : 56] He's doing everything he can to demonstrate to the officials and the nations that he is stronger than them and their God. In fact, he's so aggressive and demanding that the soldiers who take them into the fire die at the hands of the fire.

Notice also the way that Daniel describes them being thrown in here. Here the verb tense shifts in verse 21 from active to passive. Then these men were bound.

And later, they were thrown in. Or also in verse 23. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning, fiery furnace.

These two verses communicate the same idea. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had no power to save themselves. They were at the hands, they were at the mercy of Nebuchadnezzar.

And they are ready to die for their faith. It's important to note that though they are confident that God can save them, they don't know if he will.

[17 : 12] Look back at verse 17. They say, 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. But if not. This is their but if not moment.

Can you think about the gravity of this in your own life? Lord, I believe that you can heal me of this sickness, but if not.

God, you can resolve the financial crisis I'm in right now, but if not. Father, you're able to save my wandering child from their sin, but if not.

Jesus, you can save my marriage from the ruin that I made it, but if not. Holy Spirit, you can remove the darkness of my grief and depression and restore to me the joy of salvation.

[18 : 31] But if not. What happens if God chooses not to save Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? What happens if God chooses not to deliver you in this moment?

For these men, the point was not their deliverance. The point was whether or not their lives demonstrated that God alone was worthy of worship.

Listen to the rest of their statement. But if not, verse 18, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.

The point was making known to the world, these nations and officials and this king, that the God in heaven is deserving of their worship and their very lives.

And there's a danger in a sermon like this on deliverance. We can connect faith and obedience with God's deliverance from the fire in such a way that salvation becomes about prosperity and longevity and health and not about God's glory.

[19 : 51] Let me say that again. We can connect faith and obedience with God's deliverance from the fire in such a way that we look at salvation as prosperity and health and deliverance in that way and not about God's glory.

If you're faithful, God will deliver you from X. That's the thing that we could think about. If we're not careful, we can view Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as a type for us of what God will do if his people are faithful.

The philosophy might go something like this. If you raise your children right, they'll always follow after God. But what if they aren't? If you're giving faithfully, you'll be good financially.

But what if you aren't? If you work hard, you'll accomplish whatever you want. But what if you don't? You see, my point here is not to discourage giving faithfully or raising your children in the Lord or working hard.

I think that those are good, godly things that God has called all of us as his people to. And there are scriptures that we could no doubt point to and demonstrate that this is the way that it normally works in God's world.

[21 : 09] that faithfulness often produces fruitfulness. But underneath our efforts stands the sovereign purposes of God and his will for his own glory.

It's actually this truth that is more of a comfort to us than setting our hope on any kind of outcome that we could achieve. Because if our lives are about his glory, then deliverance isn't our ultimate hope in this world.

his glory is. Because we have set our hope that he will deliver us in the next. So he may or he may not save our kids.

He may restore us from this financial difficulty or he may leave us in the same condition. either way, God really is working all things for our good and his glory.

That's where faith comes in. It gives us sight beyond what we can see that God is doing because we know that he is up to good for us. In these moments we learn to pray like Jesus who was tempted and tried in every respect as we are.

[22 : 27] Maybe you remember this, how he was distressed and he was troubled in the garden of Gethsemane. He was abandoned by all of his followers. He was all alone, betrayed by one of his own.

In his hardest moment he prayed like this. Abba, Father, all things are possible for you.

Remove his cup from me. But if not, or yet, not what I will but what you will. Jesus said that prayer over and over and over three separate times until he was ready to receive God's will.

That is why it's a good idea I think for us to pray habitually how Jesus taught his disciples to pray. Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In our story, God in his mercy does in fact rescue the Hebrews.

[23 : 41] And he demonstrates his power over Nebuchadnezzar. His urgency to destroy them turns to urgency to see them. Follow along in verses 24 to 25.

It says, Then Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?

They answered and said to the king, True, O king. He answered and said, But I see four men unbound walking in the midst of the fire and they are not hurt and the appearance of the fourth is like the son of the gods.

So point number two, Nebuchadnezzar observes the Hebrews' life. Nebuchadnezzar observes the Hebrews' life. Nebuchadnezzar cannot believe his eyes.

His fuming rage turns into surprise as he observes five things. There are four men instead of three. They are unbound instead of bound.

[24 : 43] They're walking instead of fallen. They're unharmed instead of incinerated. And there is the presence of God instead of the absence in the fire.

So he confirms what he commanded with his advisors. We cast three in, right? Interestingly, the detail that stands out to Nebuchadnezzar is not the fact that they're unharmed.

It's not the fact that they're walking in a burning flame. The detail that stands out to him is that there are four people in the fire. So who is this fourth person?

Is it an angel? Is it the angel of the Lord? Is it a pre-incarnate appearance of the son? And the simple answer is that I don't know.

And I don't think the Bible tells us. What we hear is actually from Nebuchadnezzar's perspective. It's what he sees, not necessarily what the author says. And I think you'll agree that we don't want to get our theology from a pagan king who hasn't yet submitted to God.

[25 : 48] There are other texts that we can use that use the same phrase, son of the gods, like Genesis 6-2 or even Job 1-6, 2-1, and 38-7. And these all seem to refer to angels.

Even further along in the passage, Nebuchadnezzar refers to this saying that God sent his angel and delivered him. But it's still Nebuchadnezzar's words, so we can't necessarily take it on face value.

Whoever this fourth figure is, I think it's important to see that he bears God's special presence. That's what the author wants us to know. He bears God's special presence in order to keep these men from death.

But there's a question that still remains. Why have a fourth person at all? It's the same kind of thing that we ask with Nebuchadnezzar. Why heat up the fire seven times if it's already as hot to kill the Hebrews?

Why send the fourth person? God didn't have to do this. Right? If he's the creator, he could have just allowed their bodies not to be burned by the fire. And actually, in Daniel 6, when Daniel's thrown into the lion's den, he doesn't send an angel in there.

[27 : 02] He just shuts the mouths of the lions. The reason why I think God does this is that by sending the fourth person into the fire, Nebuchadnezzar knows without a shadow of a doubt that God is the one who delivered them.

God is the one who delivered them. He cannot get around it. It's kind of the difference between a speed limit sign and a police officer. Right?

Both represent the enforcement of law and justice. With a speed limit sign, you can see it and you know that there's the presence of a legal boundary. But you slow down for the police officer.

Similarly, Nebuchadnezzar could have realized that the presence of God, he could have recognized the presence of God by seeing Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego come out of the fire unharmed.

There's a shadow of a doubt that he could have done that. But what caught his attention was the fourth person. God was in this place and God delivered his servants.

[28 : 13] Verse 26 moves us to our final point. Point number three, Nebuchadnezzar confesses God's deliverance. Nebuchadnezzar confesses God's deliverance.

Follow along with me in verse 26 as we read the rest of the passage. Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace and he declared, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the most high God, come out and come here.

Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. And the satraps and the prefects and the governors and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men.

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

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

[29 : 39] For there is no other God who is able to rescue in this way. Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

At this point, Nebuchadnezzar has a different attitude. Notice the title that he uses for God. He calls them servants of the Most High God.

He cannot deny that there is a God in heaven who is promised in chapter 2 to build a kingdom that will outlast him and he will accomplish it.

But think about this title in the chapter's context. Nebuchadnezzar has set up a golden image that all are supposed to bow down to and yet he recognizes that there is a God who reigns even over the idol, even over the king of the universe or of the known world at that time.

I wonder if our lives reflect this kind of understanding of God's character, that he is the Most High God.

[30 : 55] Do you see yourself today as a servant of the king or as a king to be served? I would commend to us Paul's mindset in 2 Corinthians 5 14-15.

He says that the love of Christ controls us because we have concluded this, that one has died for all, therefore all have died. And he died for all that those who live might no longer live for themselves, but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

So let me ask, what controls you? Who are you serving?

What determines how you order your time? How you spend or save your money? What retirement looks like? What kind of spouse that you're pursuing?

How you treat your husband or your wife or your siblings or your parent? And why should the love of Christ control us? I think Paul gives the why.

[32 : 06] He says that one, that is Jesus Christ, has died for all. Why did he have to die for all? Well, this is the gospel.

That we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Romans 3-23. And that the wages of sin is death. Romans 6-23.

In other words, we all earn death by setting ourselves up as our own gods, calling attention to ourselves and making ourselves out to be the center.

And someone has to die because that's the penalty for sin. But instead of us, Jesus Christ stood as a substitute in our place.

Instead of us bearing the fire of God's wrath, Jesus stood on a cross and bore it for us. And by repenting of our sins and turning to the God who is most high, who is Lord and Savior, we are united to him.

[33 : 16] This is what we sang about in the third song. We receive his righteousness and he takes our sin. Gone. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed the sin of those who love him.

the question is not do we need saving? The question is who do we turn to for deliverance?

Is it Jesus or is it something else? Jesus gives a warning to those who have not yet turned from their sin in Matthew 13, 41 to 42.

He says that the Son of Man will send his angels and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and lawbreakers and throw them into the fiery furnace.

In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. You see in the end it's ultimately the unfaithful who are in danger not the faithful.

[34 : 24] Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were ready to go in the fire because they had already been delivered. It had no danger for them. They knew where they were going but there is a danger for those who remain in their sin and yet for us who believe Colossians 3, 1, 13 or sorry Colossians 1, 13 reminds us that he has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his Son in whom we have redemption the forgiveness of our sins.

That is good news. That's good news for us. The physical testimony of the witnesses who see God's power in verse 27 draw our attention to the fullness of God's salvation.

Look at what the king's court sees in verse 27. The fire had no had not had any power over the bodies of those men.

Isn't that an amazing verse? No power because God was with them. The thing that threatened death for them God was able to deliver them from.

So Nebuchadnezzar has nothing left to do but to bless God and his blessing here is actually the interpretation of the whole of the events that we just heard. He answers the question who is the God of Shadrach Meshach and Abednego?

- [35 : 59] And he says he's the kind of God that can deliver. No other God can deliver in this way. God alone can save those who trust in him and put away sin and serve him.
- so serve God who alone can save. Serve God who alone can save. He alone is worthy of it. I realize now looking back at my five-year-old self that my ambition to save the world wasn't about the world.
- It was really about me. I wanted to be my own savior and everyone else's. I wanted to be the one who rose above the mundane messy realities of life as a five-year-old.
- Sibling fights and desert restrictions and other things like that. And in some ways not much has changed. I still struggle with the desire to rise above the mundane things of life.
- The marital needs, the financial questions, the relational tensions, the house chores, the traffic issues, the spiritual conflict and the like.
- [37 : 22] I'm tempted to look to myself as my own savior or to look to another comfort to deliver me from what only God is able to do. But praise God that Jesus rescued that self-centered five-year-old year-old at the age of twelve.
- Praise God that he still rescues me through his word and through the ministry of others. So let's continue to seek the God who alone is able to deliver.
- Let's pray. pray. Father, thank you that you are a God who can deliver us.
- Thank you that you have become our Lord and Savior through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Lord, we're still tempted to trust in ourselves.
- We're still tempted to turn to other things. We still struggle to be our own gods and look to ourselves as the center. But God, you are able to continue to rescue us and keep us and hold us fast in Christ.
- [38 : 45] And I pray that as we go from here, Lord, you would use your word and the ministry of others to continue to do that work. Thank you for your word. Thank you for your church.
- In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen.