

The Commitment Of Baptism

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[0 : 0 0] The governors and the magistrates and the satraps and the presidents and the treasurers, all in their beautiful uniforms and all with their retinues, and they formed up around the great golden obelisk.

And they were dressed in uniforms the like of which you're familiar with, and if you're not familiar with it, wait till your next card party and look at the king and the queen and the jack.

They have Assyrian uniforms on, so you can imagine how impressive it would be to have all these people dressed in these magnificent robes gathered around.

Everybody would be out to see who's there. And then they went and he got together an orchestra, the like of which it would be hard to imagine.

There were horns and pipes and flutes and bagpipes and harps and lutes and all musical instruments, and they had trained all sorts of people to use them.

[1 : 1 0] So here was all the magistrates and the satraps and the judges and the governors and the presidents and all the people gathered in their retinue.

There in the midst was on a raised platform, no doubt, the king himself and all his glorious retinue. And gathered around him were all these musicians with all their various instruments.

If Nebuchadnezzar had ever heard of the rolling stones, he would have been delighted, because they would have fitted right into the scene. And if he ever heard of amplifiers, it would literally have blown his mind, because that was the kind of scene that he was creating.

And around this group, he brought all the people and all the languages and all the nations. And when they were all there, the command went out in everybody's language, so everybody would understand, when you hear the sound of the horn and the pipe and the trigon and the lyre and the lute and the harp, fall down and worship the golden obelisk.

Well, that's roughly a description of the way we organize our life today. And that was what Nebuchadnezzar was doing some centuries ago.

[2 : 3 7] And he was very pleased with the results. You can imagine, because Assyria was a great empire, there were many languages and many people and many cultural groups and many people having different beliefs.

But in the structure of his idea of God, represented by the golden obelisk, he was able to bring them all to worship one thing at one time.

And if you can get everybody in society worshipping one thing at one time, something like gold, you could really control society, couldn't you?

Well, he very nearly succeeded. And at this moment of glory for Nebuchadnezzar, there came to him messengers that said, you know that those Hebrews that you have appointed to high positions in your government have not bothered to bow down and to worship at the golden shrine.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, they pay no heed to you. They do not serve your gods or worship your golden image.

[3 : 57] And the messengers that brought the message really put it in the right order, the order that must be calculated to arouse Nebuchadnezzar's indignation.

The first thing they said to Nebuchadnezzar was, they pay no heed to you. That was hard on him. The second thing they said was that they don't serve your gods.

They don't conform to your ideas. And the third thing he said, they don't worship the golden image. So you can understand that that really was Nebuchadnezzar's priority, that they would see him as the source of power, that they would worship his gods, and they would fall down before his golden image.

And so Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were somewhat unceremoniously brought before the king. Now he was a wise king, and he'd had the foresight to prepare an oven, a large oven.

It would be called a psychological inducement to conform. And it was blasting away close at hand. And it was for the purpose of dealing with those who weren't prepared to fall down and worship.

[5 : 26] And so he summoned Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and said to them, Oh, well, one more chance.

When you hear the sound of the music, fall down and worship. To which, of course, they said, Oh, Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.

If it 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 which you have set up.

Now, that was what you might call a minority report on that occasion. And the reason that it was given, you could find if you looked in Isaiah chapter 43, in the first few verses, where a specific promise had been given.

[6 : 42] And the promise was this. The Lord promising his people, Fear not, I have redeemed you. I have called you by name.

You are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. And through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you.

When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned. And the flame shall not consume you.

For I am the Lord your God. They had a promise. And so they were able to speak with what would seem unwarranted boldness to Nebuchadnezzar.

And it wasn't that they were disloyal to him. Because they were highly placed officials in his government. And they had achieved that position of recognition by the faithfulness and skill with which they did their job.

[7 : 52] And yet they refused to bow down and worship. Well, as you know, the strongest men in Nebuchadnezzar's army were summoned.

They bound the three men with their garments on and their hats on their head and their shoes on their feet. And they went and thrust them into the furnace, which was so hot, having been heated seven times hotter than it ought to be, that the men who threw them in were destroyed by the heat of the fire.

And Nebuchadnezzar watched. And as he watched, he said, Are there not four men in there? Now, you can think about that problem for the rest of the afternoon, as no doubt Nebuchadnezzar did.

But it takes you aback again to that verse. When you pass through the fire, I will be with you. And that's how it's been understood ever since.

And Nebuchadnezzar knew in that moment that he was broken. And he commanded Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to come out.

[9 : 14] And then Nebuchadnezzar became an angry missionary. That is, an unhappy kind of missionary. He had to switch all his plans because he had encountered the living God.

And he told the people that if any of you speak against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, you will be torn limb from limb and your houses will be destroyed.

That's an angry missionary at work. And it's probably not the way to win converse. So people who have power bases to work from may think so.

Well, you know what happened here this morning? You have brought five children to be baptized. There is baptism by water and there is baptism by fire.

But there is baptism. And the commitment that you have made is that as those children grow, they will choose not to submit to mob manipulation.

[10 : 36] They won't be controlled by mass hysteria. They will not be subject to institutionalized violence.

They have chosen baptism. That is, they have chosen through their parents to belong to the living God.

They are to be brought up to know the difference between the power of the king, the power of the temporal authority, and the power of God.

They will be brought up to know the difference between the idea of God, which can take any form you want it to, and the living God who has confronted us personally in history in the person of Jesus Christ.

They will be brought up not to be controlled by the histrionics of power as it is exerted in our society, but rather to be to live in the promised presence of the Lord.

[12 : 01] They have been committed to learning that there is no earthly power that can ultimately succeed, and there is a spiritual power that cannot ultimately fail.

that's the commitment that has been made by parents and grandparents and godparents for these children.

That's the commitment that they have made to be the soldiers and servants of the living God and to know the difference and to be so brought up as the soldiers and servants of Jesus Christ, to be so disciplined that when they have to choose, the choice will have already been made.

They have chosen by baptism to be the servants of the living God, and that's a terrible and awesome choice to have made.

And they require the prayers and support of all of you because by reason of your baptism, you have made the same choice.

[13 : 30] That you will, by that choice and by your commitment to the person of Jesus Christ, be able to choose between the power of temporal authority and the power of God, to choose between the multitude of ideas about God and the encounter with the living God, to choose between the controlled histrionics of earthly power and the promised presence of God in the water and in the fire and in the trials of human life and to recognize that earthly power, no matter what form it takes, cannot ultimately succeed and the power of God and of his Christ cannot ultimately fail.

That's what it is to be a soldier and servant of Jesus Christ. We're going to sing hymn number 474.

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Amen. Amen.

[17 : 52] Amen. Amen.

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