

# (Daniel) Wouldn't Bow, Wouldn't Bend, Wouldn't Burn

by David Guzik

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*David Guzik's sermon explores the unwavering faith of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the face of idolatry and persecution under King Nebuchadnezzar's rule.*

**Duration:** 49:39

**Scripture:** Daniel 3:17-18, Matthew 5:14, Matthew 10:28, Matthew 10:32-33, Acts 5:29, Romans 14:12

**Topics:** "Faith And Trials", "Divine Deliverance"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the story of Nebuchadnezzar and the dedication ceremony for a great image or obelisk. Nebuchadnezzar invites all the officials of the Babylonian Empire to worship the image as a test of allegiance. However, three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, refuse to worship the image and are thrown into a fiery furnace. Miraculously, they survive and are seen walking in the midst of the fire, unharmed. Nebuchadnezzar is astonished and sees a fourth form in the furnace, which he describes as the Son of God. The speaker emphasizes that trials can lead to greater dependence on the Lord and freedom in one's life before God.

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## Transcript

Daniel, chapter three, beginning at verse one, Nebuchadnezzar, the king made an image of gold whose height was 60 cubits and it's with six cubits. He set it up in the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. Now we remind ourselves of a few things.

The book of Daniel deals with the children of Israel, actually with a small section of the children of Israel who have been basically kidnapped from the city of Jerusalem and taken away to the capital city of the Babylonian empire and the capital city, of course, was Babylon. Under the headship of King Nebuchadnezzar, these select young Jewish men from the city of Jerusalem were trained in the civil service, the MBA program, so to speak, of Babylon. They were raised up to be a new generation of leaders for the Babylonian empire.

We've seen in previous weeks how God dealt with Daniel and his companions through the whole ordeal of being taken to Babylon and making a stand in the dream which Daniel interpreted that we took a look at last time in Daniel, chapter two. Now we come back to King Nebuchadnezzar and he's making an image of gold, which reminds us of chapter two, because in Daniel, chapter two, Nebuchadnezzar had a dream of

an image and the image that Nebuchadnezzar dreamed of in Daniel, chapter two, was an image with a head of gold, but from the neck down, it was made of inferior materials, silver, brass, iron, and all the way down to clay at the toes. Well, what we need to consider about this is that this may very well be Nebuchadnezzar's way of saying, I wish that my kingdom would last forever, because in the dream which Daniel interpreted for him, who represented the head of gold? Well, Nebuchadnezzar did.

And if you notice, he's saying, well, let's dream of an image and the whole thing is gold and it's a huge image. We're talking about something very large, 90 feet tall and nine feet wide. I want you to understand this was not a statue.

It was more like a stylized obelisk, a huge obelisk reaching up to the sky, perhaps with some I don't want to throw out a twenty five cent word. I was going to say anthropomorphic, but from human like features on it. And yeah, it was worth rolling the eyes on that one.

And, you know, what you have here is more like an obelisk, actually, than a than a statue in any regard. He set it up and he was so proud of it. Take a look at it.

Chapter three, verse two now and King Nebuchadnezzar sent word to gather together the satraps, the administrators, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. So the satraps, the administrators, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the officials of the provinces gathered together for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. So they're here before this large, impressive image.

We can imagine that even though, you know, verse one tells us that it was an image of gold, you shouldn't think that it was solid gold. If you were to calculate what it would be like to take something nine feet wide and 90 feet tall, made out of solid gold. I don't know if there's that much gold, you know, in all of Asia.

Nevertheless, it was undoubtedly made of wood or some kind of structure and then covered with sheets of gold. Incredibly expensive, incredibly impressive. And you can just imagine this thing glistening in the noonday sun and how impressive it would be.

Nebuchadnezzar wants all of the officials of the Babylonian Empire to come to the dedication ceremony for this great image, for this great obelisk. And so he invites all the officials to come to the dedication, no doubt to use the worship of the image as a test of allegiance. So we're all following along so far, are we? All right.

Now, verse four, then a herald cried aloud to you. It is commanded, O people's nations and languages, that at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre and psaltery in symphony with all kinds of music, you shall fall down and worship the gold image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning, fiery furnace.

We get the picture here, right? Everybody's got the dedication ceremony. The speaker comes up, taps on the microphone. Hello.

Is this on? Can you hear me? Attention, everybody. When the music starts, bow down to the message. If you don't, we're going to torture you to death by casting you into a fiery furnace.

Well, pretty simple, right? Straightforward. What I want you to see is that this is just a test of allegiance on Nebuchadnezzar's part to see if the people of his empire, his officials, his his his administrators are loyal to him. Nebuchadnezzar regarded the refusal to worship at this image as treason.

He didn't regard it as a religious offense. That's not how Nebuchadnezzar was thinking. Nebuchadnezzar's mind probably had the idea that religion had very little to do with this.

In his mind, it was political. And in this, Nebuchadnezzar is just like most politicians who often seem willing to use religion to strengthen their grip on political power. You know, politicians are very happy to blend together spiritual allegiance and national allegiance.

In other words, you know, you're loving God when you do what your country tells you to do. And of course, we know when we've studied this on Sunday morning from the Book of Romans that we are called to be good citizens, that we are called to obey the government. Nevertheless, we hold a higher allegiance to the kingdom of God.

And we realize that the kingdom of God and the kingdom of man are not the same things. Politicians seem to want to blur this distinction often. I read a fascinating quote from the man who was the head of the youth program in Nazi Germany.

He said this in 1936. He said, if we act as true Germans, we act according to the laws of God. All right.

We're following you so far. Whoever serves Adolf Hitler, the Führer, serves Germany. OK, we've got you so far.

And then he says, and whoever serves Germany serves God. Well, that's no more naked an example than many politicians use either subtly or just as blankety. I read of one example that comes from the 1960s when the president of Ghana had a lifelike or actually a larger than lifelike statue made of himself and erected in front of the Parliament House for the whole nation.

And there was an inscription on that statue that said, Seek ye first the political kingdom and all the other things shall be added unto you. The statue was destroyed after a bloodless coup in 1966. You know, politicians always want to use spiritual things for their advantage.

And so the penalty was to be cast into a burning, fiery furnace. Verse six tells us Nebuchadnezzar was not a man who allowed lawbreakers to go unpunished. We've discussed this previously.

I don't need to go into it. But Nebuchadnezzar was known in both biblical history and secular history as a man who could be ruthless with those who crossed him. All right.

Verse seven. So at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the horn, flute, harp and lyre in symphony with all kinds of music, all the people, nations and languages fell down and worshipped the gold image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. So far, this is almost a big yawn.

Okay, great. This probably went on every few years in a kingdom like Babylon. But Nebuchadnezzar's grand idolatry was accompanied here by great theme music, elaborate, well produced.

And then in the midst of it all, they said, well, now it's time to bow down. And they did bow down. I've read that the in the original Aramaic, by the way, you should know that the text in front of us, the original language that it was written in, it was not Hebrew, it was Aramaic.

But I've researched and it says that in the original Aramaic, the literal sense of verse seven here is that as soon as they were hearing, they were falling down. They just conjured up that burning fiery furnace and they thought of the last time they got a bad sunburn and they said that was bad enough. Forget the fiery furnace.

And so as soon as that music went, you know, I can name that tune in five notes. Well, probably in about two notes, everybody was just down flat on their face. Almost everybody, verse eight.

Therefore, at that time, certain Chaldeans came forward and accused the Jews. They spoke and said to King Nebuchadnezzar, Oh, King, live forever. You, oh, King, have made a decree that everyone who hears the sound of horn, flute, harp, lyre and psaltery in symphony with all kinds of music shall fall down and worship the gold image.

And whoever does not fall down in worship shall be cast in the midst of a burning, fiery furnace. And you can just imagine this interview that they have with King Nebuchadnezzar and King Nebuchadnezzar is nodding. Yes, yes, that's what I said.

Yes, yes, that was the command. There they were thousands of administrators, every kind of sort of elected or appointed official you could think of all over the Babylonian Empire. There they were in attendance that evening.

Nebuchadnezzar is nodding his head. Yes, yes, that's what I said. Now here it says there are certain Jews whom you've said over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

These men, O King, have not paid due regard to you. They do not serve your gods or worship the gold image which you have set up. And you think the big tattletales, the rat finks are pointing these Jewish men out because apparently they weren't conspicuous at the time.

Now, I don't know why. I suppose that with so many thousands of people there around this image and so much going on that maybe they just weren't noticed in the fact that they weren't bowing down or or for whatever reason, it wasn't immediately apparent. By the way, this is something to understand here.

If it was not immediately apparent that they did not bow down to the image, then we know for certain that they didn't raise a big protest at the time. They didn't shout out, stop the music. The Bible says thou shall not bow down before a graven image.

No, their mind was, look, if these idolaters want to do it, let them. But we will not. We're not going to start a, you know, let's ban all images in the Empire of Babylon campaign.

They said, we're just not going to do it. And so they they didn't lodge a formal protest. They didn't do anything else.

They just simply refrained from sharing in the sin of idolatry themselves. Now, I want you to notice this, though, though their actions were not public in the sense of, you know, shouting out a protest, neither were they hidden. These three Hebrew men must have known that they would have been discovered.

Yet they obeyed God rather than men. And I think it's very important for us to realize that there will be many times in our Christian life, critical times where we are just required by conscience and by the Holy Spirit for us to make a stand for Jesus Christ. For us to come out and out as believers.

Charles Spurgeon has a few sermons on Daniel chapter three. One of them was absolutely amazing. I'll be reading a few quotes from that sermon here this evening.

I'll begin with this one on this very point. Spurgeon says you will not be able to go through life without being discovered. A lighted candle cannot be hid.

There is a feeling among some good people that it will be wise to be very reticent and to hide their light under a bushel. They intend to lie low all during wartime and come out when the palms are being distributed. They hope to travel to heaven by the back lanes and skulk into glory by disguise.

Ah, me, what a degenerate set. Of course, I remember as a young Christian hearing about folks called Lady Clairol Christians. It came from an old advertisement for Lady Clairol hair coloring, which I suppose many young people today wouldn't even know about.

But the slogan that they had back then for Lady Clairol hair coloring was only her hairdresser knows for sure that she colors her hair. And of course, Lady Clairol Christians were Christians that only God knows for sure that they're Christian because they conceal it from everybody else. Well, these men were not afraid to come out and out.

No, they weren't obnoxious. No, they didn't ring a bell or sound a siren or shout down the music or anything like that, but they would not bow. And surely they knew that they would be discovered.

Now, we may have a tendency to think that these were the only Jewish men who did not bow down. Not necessarily. There may have been many Jewish people who were faithful to not bow down to this idolatrous image.

I think we know very well why these three men were singled out for the accusation, because they were promoted above many of the other people in the kingdom and professional jealousy led those backstabbing office politicking kind of folks to come and just, you know, bear their claws and the fangs and all the rest of it. And they say, you're going down. We don't like how you've been promoted.

And here's our chance to, you know, create a little room in that corner office that we want. So verse 13, then Nebuchadnezzar in rage and fury gave the command to bring Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So they brought these men before the king.

Now, can you can you imagine yourself as one of these three men? Nebuchadnezzar is in rage and fury, and he's not leaving this to some low level administrators. He says, bring them to me. And they get ushered into the presence of Nebuchadnezzar and they see him and he's hot.

And they think about all the grotesque tortures that they've heard other people endure at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. Let's remember that this was the guy who was going to execute a whole class of counselors and advisors because they couldn't tell him what his dream was. This is a severe, severe man.

He means business. And it says there. So they brought these men before the king.

Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying to them, is it true? Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the gold image which I have set up. I think a couple of things about that statement there. I think, first of all, I think it's absolutely remarkable how, verse 13, Nebuchadnezzar asks, is it true? First of all, it shows him to be a wise and fair man.

He's not going to take hearsay for it. I want to hear it from their own lips. You guys have the chance to tell me, you know, maybe the king was just, you know, my back.

Oh, wow, man, I just couldn't bow down. I'm more than happy to bow down to it now. Oh, OK, well, I was forgiven.

I like you boys. Is it true? You see, I want you to see here that this this was an even greater test for Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. This was a greater test than when the music was playing and everybody was bowing down.

Because now they have the king staring them in the eye and saying, is this true? Listen, it's one thing to make a stand for God. It's a greater thing to stick to your stand when you're pointedly asked. You know, if you remember, it was Peter.

Peter, who could follow after Jesus, after his arrest. That's pretty brave of Peter. Most of the other disciples didn't do that.

Peter followed along here. You know, I'll look for the chance to break him out. You know, I've been seeing some martial arts movies and take on a legion or something.

You know, he can do it. He can go in there and maybe you can free him. And Peter had all these great attentions and he followed Jesus after his arrest.

But he wilted and he denied Jesus when a little servant girl asked him, is it true? Here was the real test. This was a greater test than when the music was playing. All right, buckle your seatbelts for a quote from Charles Spurgeon.

He's saying it, not me. Of course, I'm saying it, but I didn't write it. If standing before the heart searching God at this time, if you cannot say it is true, then how should you act? If you cannot say that you take Christ's cross and are willing to follow him at all hazards, then hearken to me and learn the truth.

Get what he's saying. He's saying if you won't answer the right way when that question is asked to you, then he's going to give you some advice. Now, he says, do not make a profession of Christianity at all.

Do not talk about baptism or the Lord's Supper, nor of joining a church, nor being a Christian. For if you do, you will lie against your own soul. If it be not true that you renounce the world's idols, do not profess that it is so.

It is unnecessary that a man should profess to be what he is not. It is a sin of supererogation, a superfluity of naughtiness. If you cannot be true to Christ, if your coward heart denies the Lord, do not profess to be his disciple.

I beseech you, he that is married to the world or flint hearted had better return to his house, for he is of no service in this war. That's a heavy word, isn't it? I think that's convicting to every one of us. Because I think probably at one time or another, every one of us has wilted under that question.

Is it true? Maybe we've made a stand for something. Maybe by our actions we've demonstrated that we're Christians or that we're believers just by our actions. We're not out trying to trumpet it.

We're not trying to advertise it. We're just in the way we live. There's something about our life that demonstrates that we're believers in Jesus Christ.

And somebody looks at it. Well, now, are you one of those? Are you one of those born again? Is it true they're asking you? And you mumble some words or say or don't say or act like something urgent just came up and I'll get back to you later. You realize that at that critical moment, you have not stood for your Lord.

And then Nebuchadnezzar, he wouldn't tolerate. Losing face in this situation. He says, going on now, he says, now, if you are ready at the time, you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre and psaltery in symphony with all kinds of music and you fall down and worship the image, which I have made good, but if you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning, fiery furnace.

And who is the God who will deliver you from my hands? You see, Nebuchadnezzar wouldn't tolerate losing face on an occasion like this. He says, you're not going to have any gods before me. There's no God out there who can deliver you from my hand.

And you can just imagine the enormous pressure on Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to compromise everything in front of them. Everything, the king, the furnace, the music, their compatriots, their competitors, all of it conspired to convince them to compromise. Yet God was more real to them than any of those other things.

Don't judge the situation by what you see from the king's threat or the threat of the punishment or by the music that you hear or any of the rest of it. No, you judge the situation by the living God and where he's at in the middle of it. You know, men, men may frown at you, men may give you that dirty face, but God in heaven will smile upon you and so you can stand and not be moved.

What a situation. You see the heart of Nebuchadnezzar here in verse 15. Who is the God who will deliver you from my hands? Nebuchadnezzar believed in gods.

He believed in a lot of pagan Babylonian gods. But he thinks nothing of insulting all of those gods. You know, Nebu was one of the great Babylonian gods.

And Nebuchadnezzar was named after the god Nebu. You might have thought Daniel or Sadrach, Meshach and Abednego might have said, well, Nebuchadnezzar, maybe Nebu can deliver us from you. Forget about Nebu, Nebuchadnezzar says, I'm here.

Nobody's going to rescue you from my hand. You see, actually, Nebuchadnezzar is more of a secularist or a humanist than a theist. The God he really believes in is the God of himself, not the gods of Babylon.

So here are these men standing here in this critical situation. And I can just imagine that after Nebuchadnezzar said this, he's saying it almost in a fatherly tone. You know, boys, boys, come on, come on, get the music started, start the music.

I can just imagine if I was filming this, I'd have the music start, all those instruments going. And then verse 16, Sadrach, Meshach and Abednego answer. Well, stop the music, they say.

There's no need to go on with the music. Because, King, oh, Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that's the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning,

fiery furnace and he will deliver us from your hand, oh King.

All right, so I'm the director shooting this scene for a film. You could go one of two ways. You could go for the, you know, Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms way, you know, where he's these three guys, they're looking Nebuchadnezzar square in the eye and they're saying, our God can deliver us from your hand.

You know, they're almost spitting as they say, bring it on, Nebuchadnezzar. Or you could go for the realistic way, the way that it probably happened. Their voice is choking, looking down at the floor, probably shaking like leaves.

But yet making the stand. Listen, it's better to make a stand and be shaking like a leaf than it is to be courageous in your disobedience. And here they were, they were going to stick to their guns, but they're probably terrified as they say these words.

They say he will deliver us from your hand, oh King. But then look at this verse 18. It's so great.

But if not, let it be known to you, oh King, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you've set up. Nothing to answer you, King. We've got no answer.

You can play the music all day long. It's not going to change anything. And you asked Mr. Nebuchadnezzar about which God is able to deliver us.

Our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us in this. These Jewish men show themselves to have a good understanding and appreciation of God's power. They know that God is able to save them from two things, from the fiery furnace.

But they don't even say that. They don't say that purely. They say the God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning, fiery furnace.

I mean, that's enough, right? But they say and from your hand. It's as if they're saying our God can deliver us from that furnace and anything else you think up. He's mightier than you, Nebuchadnezzar.

Then did you notice in verse 18? What great words. Three words to underline in your Bible. You see, in this, the Jewish men show that they have a good understanding and appreciation of submission to God.

They know God's power, but they also know that they must do what is right before God, even if God doesn't do what they expect him to do or hope him to do. You know, Nebuchadnezzar, we're with this no matter what. what? It doesn't matter if God delivers it or he doesn't.

They're not groveling, they're not whining, they're not saying before Nebuchadnezzar, this isn't fair. I'm going to label relations board about this one, Nebuchadnezzar. I can get a good lawyer about this.

No, no whining about any of that. We'll take our lumps. We won't try to excuse it.

I think it's unbelievable how they they didn't doubt God's ability to save them, but neither would they presume to know God's will. Maybe God does want him to perish. Maybe they're going to be martyrs.

They've been plenty of martyrs through the centuries. Maybe they're going to be three of them right now. In this they have the spirit of Job, where Job says in Job chapter 13 verse 15, he says, though he slay me, yet I will trust him.

You say, recognize that God's plan might be different than their desires. And, you know, you have your desires, your dreams. I have my desires and my dreams.

We all pray that God fulfills them. But if he doesn't, I'm not going to turn my back on him. Because God is more important to me than my desires or dreams.

And that's exactly how these three men felt. I think if I were to describe these men in any way, I would say that these are men who did not love too much. You ever see those popular self-help books, you know, in the bookstores, you know, women who love too much, men who love too much, men who love women who love too much, so forth and so on.

You know, many Christians are hindered because, frankly, they love too much. Oh, they love Jesus. Sure.

They also love the world. They also love the things of this world. In the early days of Christianity, do you think that Christians were thrown to the lions because they loved Jesus? No, not a single Christian was thrown to the lions because he loved Jesus.

Romans didn't care if you love Jesus, love Jesus all you want, but also burn a pinch of incense to Caesar. No, no, no, no. They weren't thrown to the lions because they loved Jesus.

They were thrown to the lions because they would not worship the emperor. So, friends, it's not enough for us to say that we love Jesus. You know, in our day, many people love Jesus and they think very highly of them, but they're far from God because they also love and worship the world.

They love and worship sin. They love and worship self. How about this from first John, chapter two, verse 15.

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the father is not in him. Well, that's laying it down on the line, isn't it? So they said, listen, let it be known to you, OK, that we will not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you've set up.

That takes a lot of faith to say that a lot of trust in God, I want you to see that God prepared them for this place by preparing them in littler things like what we saw in Daniel, chapter one. Remember that that was just about food. You're making a big deal about food, aren't you? Who cares what you eat? But I wonder how many of those Jewish men who compromised in the food also later compromised when it came to bowing down before this image.

You know, sometimes we have the mentality is, you know, oh, God, I'll serve you in the big things. I'll serve you when it really matters. God, you know, when the Gestapo come through the doors and say, who wants to go to the firing squad for worshipping Jesus, then I'll do that.

But, you know, very well, that's not going to happen. So, well, you'll make your stand there. Really, you're going to make your stand on the small things.

I think the other thing remarkable about the statement Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Is what it does not contain, does not contain any hint of excuse, isn't it? In those great times of testing, that it's easy to think of a thousand excuses that seem to justify compromise. I mean, think of all the excuses they could have come up with.

They might have said, listen, there's nothing to gain by resisting in this. We can do a lot more good for God by living rather than by dying. But look at all the great things we can do.

I mean, it's easy to say, well, we must live, right? No. The fact of the matter is, we all must die. And there's no better way to die than making a stand for God.

They might have said, hey, you know, we're in a different place, we're in Babylon. And when in Babylon, do as the Babylonians do. No, but these men knew that God has unlimited jurisdiction.

They just weren't performers, you know, when they had the right audience, they would act like they were followers of God. They did it all the time. They might have said, listen, we'll lose our jobs and our standard of living.

What will bail out on that? And then, oh, no. You know, when God often blesses us, we make the blessing an idol and we compromise God to keep what we have. They might have said, well, listen, we're not being called to renounce our God.

All we're being called to do is bow down before the statue. You know, I'll hold my cross, my fingers and just bow down and do it. But they didn't have one of those super elastic consciences that said, well, we're not bowing down to the idol, we'll just do it in respect for the king or for the music.

No, that that's a common kind of excuse, but it just proves the principle that anything will serve as an excuse when the heart is bent on compromise. It could have said everybody else is doing it. They could have said, listen, it's only once.

It's just for 10 minutes. It's stupid to throw our lives away for 10 minutes. Listen, 10 minutes can change your whole life.

You know that very well, don't you? 10 minutes of a wrong choice of a bad mistake. They might have said this, and this is one that I hear too often. Well, this is more than what can be expected of us.

God, God will understand just this once. You ever heard that rationalization for sin? You ever used it yourself? It's embarrassing to look at yourself and say, I've used that one. God, God understand.

God will understand. This is a tough one. God understands.

We know God does understand our struggle with sin. He understands it. You better believe he understands it.

And that's why he loves the sinner and why he made provision at the cross for freedom from the penalty and the power and the presence of sin. Listen, knowing that God understands that should be a spur to obedience, not a license for disobedience. So they stood strong here and look what happens.

Verse 19, then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury. You know, he was mad before. Can you imagine now these three guys of the impudence to say this to him? He was full of fury and the expression on his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego again, because before he had this fatherly manner, boys, boys.

But if they say this to him, boy, you can just see his face change. Therefore, he spoke and commanded that they heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated. Well, first of all, you should

understand that's a proverbial expression.

It's not like they said, well, you know, it's 100 degrees. Let's heat it up to 700. It's just they made it extra, extra hot.

Now, this is a great lesson for us on how anger blinds you. If you wanted to torture somebody, would you torture them more by casting them into a hotter furnace or a cooler furnace? The cooler furnace would be much more torturous because there they would languish in these low grade burns and maybe survive for days and days and days until they died. A hotter furnace, you won't even know what hit you.

You go in there, boom, you're annihilated. That's it. But anger blinds you, doesn't it? And you just see, oh, I'll really get them now.

Make it seven times hotter. Well, really, he's making it easier. But that just shows how anger blinds us.

Going on now. And he commanded certain mighty men of valor who were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and cast them into the burning, fiery furnace. These men were bound in their coats, their trousers, their turbans and their other garments and were cast into the midst of the burning, fiery furnace.

Therefore, because of the king's command was urgent and the furnace exceedingly hot, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, fell down, bound into the midst of the burning, fiery furnace. Can you imagine it here? Their last chance to change their mind, evaporate.

You know, I suppose because verse 19 tells us that the expression on Nebuchadnezzar's face changed, I'm supposing that he was forcing a pleasant expression, you know, like when dad's mad at you, but he's smiling, you know, because he's wanting to be pleasant and civil and he's holding it all in and everything, you know, and he said, well, you know, kids, can't we just work this out, you know? And then and then the kids say something to really set off dad and then they see his real fury. But you know how it works between kids and says when when they see the real fury flash from dad, OK, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. And that was their last chance, right? I mean, they saw the real fury from Nebuchadnezzar and they might have said at that moment, OK, OK, we'll do it.

You know, it's one thing to make a stand in front of the smiling face. Now they have the snarling face of rage in front of them and they wouldn't back down. You know, despite all of that intense intimidation, the men stayed courageous in their confession of faith.

Spurgeon very eloquently described the horror of those people who lose their courage at such a time. Quoting now. Remember also that by yielding to the fear of man, you are demeaning yourself.

There shall come a day when the man who was ashamed of Christ will himself be ashamed. He will wonder where he can hide his guilty head. Look at him.

There he is, the traitor who denied his Lord. The Christ was spat upon and nailed to the cross. And this man was afraid to own him, to win the smile of a silly maid, to escape the jest of a coarse fellow, to win a few pieces of silver, to stand respectable among his fellow men.

He turned his back upon his redeemer and sold his Lord. And now what can be said for him? Who can excuse him? The angel shunned him as a man who was ashamed of the Lord of glory. He is clothed with shame and everlasting contempt.

Even the lost in hell get away from him, for many of them were more honest than he. Is there such a man as this before me? I summon him in the name of the living God to answer for his cowardice. Let him come forth and own his crime and humbly seek forgiveness at the hands of the gracious savior.

You know, friends, tonight may be a night where you need to be real about the way that you've denied the Lord. And just be honest before God and before others and confess your sin. You know, the great thing is that it's not the unpardonable sin.

Oh, God will forgive you, Jesus will forgive you. But he wants to restore a relationship with you, he'll restore that relationship on the basis of when you're convicted of sin, you confess it and repent of it. I think the worst thing for us to do when we come to a very convicting example in scripture like this is to just tell ourself it's OK.

Nobody can really be expected to live up to that. Let's move on. No, no.

Well, we see the glorious result here in verse 24. Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and he rose in haste and spoke, saying to his counselors, did we not cast three men bound in the midst of the fire? And they answered and said, I'm true, O King. Look, he answered, I see four men loose walking in the midst of the fire and they're not hurt.

And the form of the fourth is like the son of God. Now. It's astonishing.

That anybody survived for a moment inside of that furnace, because in the verses that we just read, we saw that men perished at the door of the furnace. And these are surviving right in the midst of it, you know, in the Septuagint, which is an ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament, it says in Daniel, chapter three, verse twenty four, that Nebuchadnezzar's attention was caught when he heard them singing praises in the furnace. And this is the way I would picture it.

Nebuchadnezzar has them thrown in. And what need does he have to look into the furnace after that? They're gone, right? Obliterated. He washes it good.

They got what they deserve. And he starts walking away and then he hears singing from coming from the furnace. Well, that's got to stop you, right? I mean, you expect maybe you'll hear the moment of an anguish cry, but he hears singing.

He stops. He turns open up that door. Let me look inside.

And that is as safe a distance as he can. He looks inside. What does he see? He sees four forms walking around in there.

And then he tells us who the fourth form was. He says in the form of the fourth is like the son of God. Well, I believe Jesus was within their one of these unique and remarkable sort of preview appearances of God, the son in human form before his incarnation in Bethlehem.

Jesus was literally with them in the worst of their trial. And what I think is fascinating about this is there's absolutely nothing in the text to tell us whether or not Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego knew that the

son of God was with them. Maybe they did.

Maybe they didn't. Nebuchadnezzar saw it, but they didn't go and say, well, did you see that fourth guy with us in there? There's nothing in the text to tell us that they did or didn't. I think that's instructive.

Because, you know, Jesus is with us in the midst of our fiery trials. Sometimes you see him and sometimes you don't. Sometimes, you know, he's there.

Have you experienced that? We're in the midst of an intense trial. You never felt closer to Jesus than before, just never. And there's other times where in the midst of trial, it seems like Jesus is a million miles away.

But he's there. He's there. Friends, you see this great challenge that they faced and God saw them through it in a glorious way.

I think it's amazing to see that that God could have delivered them any way that he chose. He could have made Nebuchadnezzar back down so that they never went into the furnace. I mean, God can deliver us from a trial or he can miraculously sustain us and strengthen us in a trial.

Either way, it's not up to us to dictate to God how to do it. I mean, our preferred way is, Lord, deliver us from trials, right? Just we never even want to be in them. Just never, Lord, just keep me from every trial.

You know, that's not God's will for your life. He wants you to experience some of his deliverance in the midst of the trial. So sometimes you'll arrange it where you never go in the furnace.

Other times you arrange it where you're going to go in, but I'll be with you in the midst of it there. And what did the fires of the furnace do? You noticed that, didn't you? Now there are four men loose walking in the midst of the fire. Well, did they go in there loose? No, they went in there completely bound.

But the fires of the trial freed them, loosed them walking around like free men. You see, the fire only burnt the ropes that bind them. Isn't that God's intention for a trial? Through the greater dependence that it draws out of you on the Lord, through the way that it strips away the things that you once relied on, that you really have no business relying on in your life.

Now, now you're closer to the Lord and now you're more free in your life before God. So now, verse 26, then Nebuchadnezzar went near the mouth of the burning, fiery furnace and spoke, saying, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out, come here. Then Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came from the midst of the fire.

The satraps, administrators, governors and the king's counselors gathered together and they saw these men on whose bodies the fire had no power. The hair of their head was not singed, nor were their garments affected. And the smell of fire was not on them.

Now, that's I mean, how much more extreme can you get like that? Their clothes didn't even smell like fire. Even before they're out of the furnace, though, what does Nebuchadnezzar say to them there in verse 26? Servants of the Most High God. Well, I guess there is a Most High God.

I guess there is a God greater than me. I asked about that God and I guess you've just shown me who he is. It says these men on whose bodies the fire had no power, the trial had no power over these men because they were thoroughly submitted to the power and the will of God.

You know, I think even before the time of Jesus, they knew the principle Jesus talked about where he said in the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world. Friends, it's glorious, a glorious example of deliverance.

And some people take this whole account to say that it perhaps illustrates perhaps serving as a type of the nation of Israel during the Great Tribulation. They say Nebuchadnezzar is like the Antichrist who forces the whole world into a religion of idolatry. And Nebuchadnezzar's image is like the image described in Revelation, chapter 13, that the whole world will be commanded to worship.

And the fiery furnace is like the Great Tribulation, which will be a time of great affliction for the Jewish people. And the three Hebrew men are like Israel, who will be preserved through the tribulation. And the executioners who perished are like those who are in league with the Antichrist, whom Jesus will slay at his return.

Well, then who's the church like? Well, the mysteriously absent Daniel is like the church, not even present for this time of great tribulation. Anyway, wrapping up now, verse 28, Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who sent his angel and delivered his servants who trusted in him and they frustrated the king's word and yielded their bodies that they should not serve nor worship any God except their own. Therefore, I make a decree that any people, nation or language which speaks anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego shall be cut in pieces and their houses shall be made an ash heap because there's no other God who can deliver like this.

And the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon. Well, they got an even better office, didn't they? You know, I want you to notice that these Hebrew men did not ask for Nebuchadnezzar to make this decree. They probably didn't want him to.

You know, friends, coerced worship isn't good, whether it's towards an idol or whether it's towards the true and living God. Nobody can coerce your worship. I would say that God doesn't even coerce your worship.

You know, God wants to woo you. You know what wooing is, don't you? It's when someone tries to draw you by the influence of love, by their affection and care for you. You know, if this text speaks to us about anything, it speaks to us about our great need for courage to stand as servants of Jesus Christ.

But I don't want anybody to leave with a sense of condemnation. Conviction, I hope, but condemnation, no. The Lord is wooing you to a closer relationship with him.

So let's conclude. I'll pray and then we'll have a brief time of just open prayer. Father, we're humbled by the great courage of these men.

And Lord, I stand before you and before these precious people that I love. And Lord, I confess that there have been times when I haven't stood for Jesus as I should. That the fear of man has made me silent when I should speak.

It's made me hide when I should just be myself. Lord, I confess that to you. I confess it before my brothers and sisters because I suppose, Lord, that a public sin or failing like that, Lord, it merits in some regard a public confession.

But Lord, I know that you are rich to forgive. And Jesus, I just don't want anything to be in the way of my relationship with you. Father, I pray that you would move upon every heart here this evening in a similar

way.

Lord, make us properly convicted and might I say, Lord, properly ashamed of failing to stand for you. Not improperly, Lord, not the condemnation that the devil would heap, but Lord, properly ashamed and determined to rely on you for the courage of the moment. We bless you.

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