

Bow or Burn

by Denis Lyle

The sermon 'Bow or Burn' teaches that God's people must stand firm in their faith and not compromise, even in the face of adversity and persecution.

Scripture: Isaiah 43:2, Daniel 3:16, Acts 5:29, Ephesians 5:11, 1 Peter 1:7

Topics: "Faith And Courage", "Persecution And Refining"

Description

Denis Lyle preaches on the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from Daniel 3, highlighting their unwavering faith and courage in the face of persecution. These three young men refused to bow down to the golden image, demonstrating their commitment to worship God alone, even at the risk of their lives. The sermon emphasizes the importance of standing firm in one's faith, even in the midst of fiery trials, as God uses such experiences to purify and refine believers. Through the furnace of persecution, God preserves His people, walking with them and promoting them to greater levels of spiritual maturity and service.

Transcript

Reading: Daniel 3:1-30 5. BOW OR BURN John Chrysostom was one of the greatest of the Greek church fathers. He lived in AD 347-407. As a very young Christian he was brought before the Emperor, who said that if he would not give up Christ, he would be banished from the country. Chrysostom said, "You cannot, for the whole world is my Father's land. You can't banish me." The Emperor said, "Then I will take away all your property". "You cannot. My treasures are in heaven", was the reply.

" Then I'll take you to a place where there is not a friend to speak to." Chrysostom replied, "You cannot. I have a friend who is closer than a brother. I shall have Jesus Christ forever". The Emperor finally threatened, "Then I'll take your life". The answer was " You cannot. My life is hid with God in Christ". And the emperor said, "What do you do with a man like that" Its easy to be a Christian when everything is fine, but when the fire is hot, thats different. Are you in the furnace right now God's people experience all kinds of furnaces.

Maybe its a family furnace. Or maybe your furnace is a deep personal problem. I don't know how to define your furnace experience, but remember some lessons can be learned only in the furnace. The furnace experiences, the persecutions that come to believers are good for us. God purifies us through such times. He uses persecution to purge the impurities in our lives, to get out the sin that creeps in. Sometimes He puts us into the flames of persecution to burn away things that ought not to be in our lives, but sometimes

He does it to put us to the test. (1 Pet 1:7) Here we have three "profiles in courage".

These young men are immortalised in the halls of the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11. It says, "through faith (they) quenched the violence of fire". Now we can look at this wonderful chapter in one of two ways. We can look at it Prophetically: For here we have a wonderful picture of events in the last days. You'll notice that Daniel was not present when these things were done, possibly he was away on official business for the king. This pictures the Rapture of the church for when the church has been taken out of this world, then Satan will carry out his diabolical plans for enslaving the minds and bodies of men.

He will raise up a world-ruler the Anti-Christ (2 Thes 2:2) who like Nebuchadnezzar will conquer the nations and establish a totalitarian state. He will set up his own image and force the world to worship it. Our Lord Jesus refers to this as "the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet". (Matt 24:15) You see, this image in the Old Testament is a preview of one revealed in the New Testament. Did you notice that Nebuchadnezzar's image is identified with the number 6 (3:1) So is the image of the Anti-christ.

It will be an image to Mr. Trinity of Failure himself, the man whose mystical number is 666. So we can look this passage Prophetically, but we're going to look at it Practically this ...! In these opening chapters of this book we find a series of tests for believers. In (Ch 1) we have the test of the believers Walk: in (Ch 2) we have the test of the believers Witness, now in (Ch 3) we have the test of the believers Worship. Now this chapter centres around these three faithful men who stood for God. (1) THEY WOULD NOT BOW According to the Septuagint's (the oldest Greek version of the Old Testament) account of this passage, there were somewhere between 16-20 years between the end of chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3.

So Nebuchadnezzar had plenty of time to rethink his impulsive commitment to the Lord and revive his own egomania. The king's command was all that all would fall down and worship this 90 foot golden image, which in reality meant worshipping the king himself. Let's begin in (3:1) and notice: (a) THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE IMAGE: Look at the SPLENDOUR of it: (3:1) "an image of gold". After all was he not the "head of gold", in the image he saw in his dream. (2:38) Then why not make the entire image of gold and glorify the king even more.

He was not content to be the head of gold, he wants to be all of gold. Look at the SIZE of it: Its 90 feet high and 9 feet wide. Archaeologists excavating about 6 miles south east of the city of Babylon (modern Iraq) have found ruins which they believe might be the foundation of this image. My, everything Nebuchadnezzar did was lavish and done with flair. Look at the SITE of it: The word Dura is still common in the Mesopotamian region and simply means "walled place". The word "plain", means a stretch of land between mountains.

It was erected in a sort of natural arena. Conveniently located so that its full potential could be exploited. This would become a mecca for pilgrims. Look at the SIGNIFICANCE of it: What it all means I believe that there were at least 2 reasons behind this project. One was: 1. To ELEVATE Nebuchadnezzar's PERSON: Daniel had said he was the head of gold, but the vain king wanted to be the whole thing. His cry was "mine is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever". It was pride that lay at the root of his ambition.

The attempt by man to glorify himself! Yet unknown to the king there was a revelation by God of men here. Do you know what that revelation was Total failure! For the image had the number 6 stamped upon it and the number 6 in the Bible is the number of man. It was on the 6th day that God created man. Six is the number of man's failure. Man never quite gets there. Man always comes short of seven which is the

number of Divine perfection. Man is a failure. My, we cannot reach up to God but God has reached down to us.

The Lord Jesus God's perfect man came and died on a cross that we might be saved. Yes, (1) 2. To CONSOLIDATE Nebuchadnezzar's EMPIRE: For this image was an object of worship. (3:5) Do you see what old Nebuchadnezzar was trying to do He was trying to consolidate his empire and unify his provinces politically. He understood that one of the best ways to unite people politically is to unite them religiously. Have a common religion! Did you know that we have three attempts recorded in the Bible to institute a one world religion The first is the Tower of Babel in (Gen 11) They wanted to have Political Unity symbolised by the City and they wanted to have Religious Unity symbolised by the Tower.

The second attempt is right here on the Plain of Dura. The final attempt will take place in the last days when the image of the Anti-Christ will be set up in the Temple in Jerusalem and the entire world will be required to worship it. (Rev 13:15) There will be a one world religion. My, Ecumenism and the Charismatic Movement is paving the way for it. No wonder God says "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them". (Eph 5:11) Are you still stuck in some old ecumenical church that's trying to get as near Rome as it can (a) (b) THE INSTRUCTION OF THE KING: It was very simple.

All must conform to state worship. 1. This was a COMMAND to WORSHIP: Look at (3:5) The word "worship", appears not less than eleven times! This was a gathering at which worship was demanded from the subjects of the Babylonian Empire! Now of course you cannot command worship. Worship is something that comes spontaneously out of the heart. It must be in "spirit and in truth". (Jn 4:24) My, you can force people to get down on their knees in front of images, but you can't force them to worship if they don't want to. 1. 2.

This was a Command to Worship BY THE STATE: The golden representing the state and monarch was to be worshipped. Now of course we know today that the "powers that be", (Rom 13:1) are ordained of God and we are to be subject to them. Incidentally, that goes for how you drive. But when that power commands us to do something contrary to the Word of God our duty is clear, "we ought to obey God rather than men". (Acts 5:29 4:19) My, there could come a time in this province when with increasing European influence the state will command us to do something contrary to God's Word and then we will have to real men and stand for God! 1. 2. 3.

This was a Command to Worship by the State with A POWERFUL INCENTIVE: The edict was clear. Look at (3:6) It was either "BOW OR BURN" You see, the Romans executed criminals through crucifixion, the Jews by stoning and the Babylonians by burning. This was undoubtedly the most persuasive altar call of all times. Can you picture the scene As the orchestra begins to play and thousands fall to the ground in worship, that is all but three, for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are still standing during the invitation!

For while there was (a) (b) (c) THE OBSTRUCTION OF THE JEWS: They would not BOW! (3:12) But wasn't there another way out Wasn't there some slight compromise that these young men could adopt that would make everyone happy I mean we today are masters of the "art", of rationalising away the clear commands of Scripture. They could have said, * "We are in Babylon let's do as the Babylonians do." * "Why not join the system, we can't beat city hall." * "We'll cooperate with Nebuchadnezzar, win him to God." * "A living dog is better than a dead lion, better red than dead, he who fights and runs away lives to fight another day." * "Daniel, our leader is not here to make the right decision for us."

All these excuses could have been used, but they were weren't for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had been brought up on the Word of God. Do you know what the Word of God said (Exod 20:4-5) John Calvin, the great theologian said, "A true image of God is not to be found in all of the world, and hence, His glory is defiled and His truth is corrupted by the lie whenever He is set before our eyes in a visible form. Therefore to devise any image of God is itself impious, because by the corruption of His majesty it is adulterated, and He is figured to be other than who He is".

Now its not easy to go against the crowd. Its not easy to be a non-conformist. But here were three Hebrews who would not bow. The world said to them, "bow down you stupid fools". But they said, "we will not bow." Young folk are you as clear in your stand in school: university: college When there's peer pressure, when the majority want you to conform and go with them to the dance: disco: drink: drugs, are you like these three Older folk what about you Have you made up your mind that you're not going to bow to anything that is contrary to God's Word (1) (2) THEY WOULD NOT BUDGE Can you try and put yourself in their shoes for a moment Do you see the triple charge that's brought against them in (2:12) The charge was threefold! * They disregarded the Sovereign: "have not... thee." * They disobeyed the Statement: "serve not thy gods." * They disapproved of the Statue: "nor worship...

" Now because of all this: (a) THEIR SOVEREIGN WAS UNMERCIFUL: Look at his FURY: (2:13) Now this is the second time we read the king was angry. (2:12) Here was a man who could not handle his emotions. This world's Babylon always has its images of gold and it demands that we bow to them. But the Bible says, "Be not conformed to this world". Or "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its mould". The world wants us all to have the same standards its standards: to accept the same beliefs its beliefs: to go to the same places its places: to do the same things its things and when someone dares to be different the world is upset and gets angry.

Look at his FOLLY: (2:14) This king is amazed. He could hardly believe his ears. He could not believe that anyone would stand and defy him. Nebuchanezzar had the idea that everyone had his price. Now many people do have their price. Some people will compromise their convictions for a very small price. But some people in this world are not for sale. Charles Haddon Spurgeon was brought up in England and called to preach at an early age. In his early twenties he became pastor of a church in London, so many came to hear him they had to move out of the building in order to expand.

By the time the expansion was completed so many people were coming they had to build an even bigger place. For many years Spurgeon preached to 5,000 -6,000 people at a time. He used to beg his members to stay away on Sunday nights so that unsaved people could get in. At the same time Spurgeon was preaching in London, PT Barnum was in the circus business in USA His job was to get a crowd also, to fill up his tent. He heard about the young Spurgeon who was drawing such large crowds and he wired an offer to Spurgeon to come over to the USA and speak in his tent.

He wanted the young preacher to draw big crowds for him. PT Barnum offered Spurgeon an enormous amount of money to come and speak at his circuses. Spurgeon wired back one verse of Scripture, "Read Acts 8:20". Do you know what that verse says "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money". Thank God, for men who cannot be bought. But can you see the kings fury: folly: Look at his FOCUS: In (2:15) Can you see the king moving the focus of the battle Now the battle was not between the king and the young men, its was between the king and the God of heaven.

"Who is that God" My, people may not know about the God of heaven, but that does not change the fact that there is a God in heaven... a God who created fire who can turn it up or off at will: a God in heaven who can deliver: who has power over the potentates of earth: a God in heaven who is real and works on the behalf of His children! Yes, Their Sovereign was Unmerciful: but (b) THEIR STAND WAS UNCOMPROMISING: Nebuchadnezzar was about to hear words that he had never heard in the corridors of his palace before. 1.

Look at their COURAGE: (2:16) They are simply saying "Nebuchadnezzar we don't have to take time to think up our answer. We don't have to study the matter to see what we're going to do. God's law says, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image..." (Exod 20:4) Therefore we will not budge! Its wonderful to see people who have got the courage of their convictions. Athanasius was one of the early church fathers. We are indebted to him for the purity of the doctrine of the deity of Jesus Christ.

He would not relinquish his stand against a popular heresy of the day. Someone came to him and said, "Athanasius don't you know that the Emperor is against you, the bishops are against you, the church is against you, the whole world is against you". Do you know what Athanasius said, " Then Athanasius is against the whole world". 1. 2. Look at their CLARITY: in (2:17) It was Samuel Johnson who said, " Depend upon it when a man knows he is to die tomorrow morning it clears his mind wonderfully".

Faced with the possibility of being thrown into the furnace, these men spoke with clarity. 3. Look at their CONFIDENCE: for life and death they were willing to rest their case in Gods hands for God to do as He willed. (2:18, 2:27) Their confidence was in: * The SUFFICIENCY of God: "Our God is able". (2:17) Do you believe it He is able to Save: (Heb 7:25) He is able to Keep: (Jude 24) He is able to "do exceeding abundantly..." (Eph 3:20) There are no limits to the power of God.

Sometimes God delivers us out of the fire, sometimes God delivers us through the fire. * The SOVEREIGNTY of God: "But if not..." (2:18) If God delivered... great. If God did not deliver... great. In the first case they would live, in the second case they would be in glory. In either case they were willing to accept the will of God. My, are we prepared for "if nots", of life Some folk will serve the Lord as long as He does what they want Him to do. But what if God does not do what we want Him to do The question is not, can God do something, the question is will God do something Sometimes God will deliver us from the fiery furnace, and sometimes He will let us go through the fiery furnace.

In (Acts 12) we read of two apostles, James and Simon Peter. James was killed by the king, Peter was delivered by the Lord. Why didn't God save both of them Now listen: its great faith that says "God will deliver". But its greater faith that says, " If God does not deliver we will still be faithful to Him". Are you prepared to serve the Lord even when things do not turn out the way you think they should God can deliver but if not! God can heal but if not! God can move in this situation but if not!

God can answer our prayer but if not! * * Their confidence * The SUPREMACY of God: "we will not serve thy gods". (2:18) Why Because God was supreme in their hearts. My, one of these days the battle will be over. Then it will matter whether or not we stood for the Lord Jesus. Then it will be all important whether we were faithful to Him in difficult circumstances! My, let me encourage you this... Christ is worth standing for! (1) (2) (3) THEY WOULD NOT BURN Now they would rather burn than turn so into the furnace they went bound in their own clothing.

My, some lessons can be learned only in the furnace experiences of life. Are you in the furnace right now Is it a family furnace A business furnace Well, in that furnace experience you will learn the: (a) THE

LESSON OF PERSECUTION: Let me share a promise with you that might not be so exciting as some of the others. "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." (2 Tim 3:12) You say, "I'm a Christian and I'm not being persecuted". Well, look at the promise.

You make your mind that you are going to do live like Christ and for Christ and you'll suffer. Can you imagine how the devil must have been gloating, "Now see what you have done fools, you have gone overboard on religion you've refused to compromise just a little and now you are going into the fire where you deserve to go". Now what is the lesson here Well, there are furnace experiences in life and sooner or later we're going to be immersed in them. It may be the furnace of Criticism... if you are successful people will criticise you, if you are not people will criticise you.

There's always a critic somewhere! It may be the furnace of isolation. Noone understands and noone cares enough to help. Maybe you are in the furnace of intimidation. Do you feel put down and threatened You see, God allows us to go through the furnace experiences of life to purify us and make us more like His Son! But in the furnace we will learn: (b) THE LESSON OF PRESERVATION: For God will never forsake His own when they go through the fiery trial. My, the Lord may not keep us out of the furnace but He will go with us and bring us through for His glory!

Do you see what happened here 1. They were UNBOUND: Look at (3:25) God was keeping His Word. He had said, " When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned neither shall the flame kindle upon thee". (Is 43:2) You see that furnace had become a microwave oven. Did you know that the fire in a microwave oven is selective It cooks some things but not others. Well, the flames in this fire became selective flames. They did not burn the boys, but the bonds that bound them were burned off by the flames of the furnace.

Do you see why God lets you go through the furnace He wants to free you from things that are binding you God takes that fire and uses it to rid your life of those things that hinder you from being everything you ought to be! 2. They were UNHARMED: "and they have no hurt." Instead of writhing in agony they are walking in victory. Why Because the Lord Jesus is with them! We call this an Old Testament theophany... an Old Testament manifestation of the eternal Son of God, the Lord Jesus.

Now don't miss the picture here. Down here on earth people who saw this situation must have thought, " aren't they fools But the Lord Jesus in heaven stepped off His throne, strode through the battlements of heaven, descended the starry staircase to earth, assumed human form, walked over to that furnace, opened the door, went inside and said to the fire, "cool it". And the fire lost it's heat! Now tell me: are you good at maths How many went into the fiery furnace Three When the king counted them how many did he count in the furnace Four When the king commanded them to come out of the fiery furnace, how many came out Three!

Where was the fourth man he saw in the fire He was still there! That means that when you go through the furnace of fire, the Lord Jesus is already in there waiting for you. He will be right there and He will walk with you though the trial. " When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie My grace all sufficient shall be thy supply The flames shall not hurt thee, I only design Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine. (c) THE LESSON OF PROMOTION: For after praising Gods Person, Nebuchadnezzar honours Gods Servants! (3:30 They were actually better off for having gone through the fire!

For through this fiery ordeal they experienced the Lord's presence: they exalted the Lord's Person: and they received the Lord's Promotion! Are you going through the fire Are you saying, " when is it all going to

be over" The Lord is getting the impurities out of your life and when He see's you becoming more and more like Him, then He will take you out of the fire and He will promote you and use you in ways you never dreamed possible! Trust Him!

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