



# Potomac Hills

## Presbyterian Church, PCA

By Grace Alone ~ Through Faith Alone ~ In Christ Alone

The Reverend Dr. David V. Silvernail, Jr.  
Daniel 3:1-30

February 1, 2009  
English Standard Version

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### *“Faith in the Fiery Furnace”*

This is the 4<sup>th</sup> sermon in the series on the book of Daniel entitled,  
*“A Broken World and a Sovereign God.”*

#### **Daniel 3:1-30**

*“King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. <sup>2</sup> Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. <sup>3</sup> Then the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. <sup>4</sup> And the herald proclaimed aloud, “You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, <sup>5</sup> that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. <sup>6</sup> And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace.” <sup>7</sup> Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, all the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.*

*<sup>8</sup> Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews. <sup>9</sup> They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, “O king, live forever! <sup>10</sup> You, O king, have made a decree, that every man who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image. <sup>11</sup> And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace. <sup>12</sup> There are certain Jews whom you*

have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, pay no attention to you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

<sup>13</sup> Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king. <sup>14</sup> Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, “Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? <sup>15</sup> Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?”

<sup>16</sup> Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> **But if not**, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

<sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> And 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. <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace.

<sup>24</sup> Then King 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.” <sup>25</sup> 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 a son of the gods.”

<sup>26</sup> Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace; 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. <sup>27</sup> And the satraps, the prefects, 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. <sup>28</sup> 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 serve and worship any god except their own God. <sup>29</sup> 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, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way.” <sup>30</sup> Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.”

Heavenly Father, once again we have come to Your Word and we thrill to hear this story and we

*thrill to realize that this is the truth. We ask that by the power of the Holy Spirit, You enable us to understand what you want us to learn from this text. Do this in and for each of us, this morning, in Jesus' name, and for His glory, Amen.*

### **INTRODUCTION: *But If Not*<sup>1</sup>**

In early 1940 the British and their allies sent a force of some 350,000 men into the low countries of Europe to stem the tide of German advance into France, Belgium and Holland. Caught in a brilliant pincer movement by the invading German forces the beleaguered British Expeditionary Force was pushed back to the beaches of the small Belgian town of Dunkirk. To everyone's surprise the Germans halted their advance to regroup.

As England and the world waited for what appeared to be the sure and certain annihilation of 350,000 men a three word message was transmitted from the besieged army at Dunkirk. It read simply, "***But if not.***"

The British people understood the biblical import of the cryptic message. It was a reference to the Old Testament book of Daniel, where Daniel and his friends chose death rather than worship an image of the pagan king, Daniel 3:17-18, "*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.*"<sup>18</sup> ***But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.***"

The British Expeditionary Army, surrounded, cutoff and on the brink of destruction was declaring to Britain and to the world that even in apparent defeat they were, in fact, victorious. The message, more eloquent than a sermon delivered in any Cathedral, galvanized the British people.

In a matter of hours thousands of boats of every description headed across the dangerous waters of the English Channel and, at the risk of their own lives from enemy fire, began the evacuation of the heroic but beleaguered army in what historians now refer to as "The Miracle of Dunkirk."

The British Navy sent destroyers and transport ships to evacuate the troops but they couldn't get in to the shallow water of the beaches of Dunkirk. This is when the little ships came to play their part. A variety of motor boats, fishing smacks, trawlers, lifeboats, paddle steamers, and many other types of watercraft came over the channel to assist in the escape. They mainly ferried the troops from the beaches to the destroyers laying offshore — but thousands of troops came all the way back to England in some of these boats.

This chapter of Daniel has long been taught as a lesson about the faith of these brave young men, and we're told to emulate them, and that's not a bad thing. But ultimately, this chapter isn't about having more faith, but about placing the faith **you do have** in the One True God who is Sovereign over all circumstances ... even fiery furnaces.

And that's the point of this passage. The Book of Daniel is not about us, and it's not about Daniel, and it's not about his three friends, but it's about **a Sovereign God and the coming of the Kingdom.**

And so, with that in mind, let's continue our study of the Book of Daniel, we're in

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<sup>1</sup> The Introduction is adapted from *The Body* by Charles Colson, page 335. This is a great book on the church that everyone should read. It has been republished with the title *Being the Body*. A good short article on "The Miracle of Dunkirk" can be found at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/765004.stm>. One of the best books on the subject is *Escape from Catastrophe, 1940 Dunkirk* by David Knowles.

chapter 3, and we'll start by seeing ...

**v. 1-7: THE DEFIANCE OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR <sup>2</sup>**

*“King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. <sup>2</sup> Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. <sup>3</sup> Then the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. <sup>4</sup> And the herald proclaimed aloud, “You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, <sup>5</sup> that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. <sup>6</sup> And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace.” <sup>7</sup> Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, all the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshipped the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.”*

The idea of an enormous golden statue immediately reminds us of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter 2. In that dream, the stature had a head of gold, which represented Nebuchadnezzar, while the rest of the body was made of silver, bronze, iron, and clay, which depicted the lesser kingdoms that would come after him and end up fragmented, destroyed by the coming of God's Kingdom.

Now, however, Nebuchadnezzar makes a statue made entirely of gold in an apparent attempt to counteract the dream. If you're going to understand Daniel 3, you have to understand that Daniel 3 is a **response** to Daniel 2. This is a **defiant** statement on the part of Nebuchadnezzar asserting that there would be no end to his kingdom, there would be no **“after this,”** but rather that his kingdom and his glory would continue forever. It's a deliberate, defiant statement that **“that dream”** [which we saw in Daniel 2] was **not** going to happen, even though it was given directly by God.

The identity of the statue isn't made clear: many think it was of Nebuchadnezzar himself, but the text merely states that it was *“the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.”* But it says this **eight times**. In other words, even if the statue represented some god, there was no doubt as to whose **power lay behind the statue**. It was not the power of the god of the golden image, but **the power of the king who set the image up**.

In contrast to Daniel's confession in **Daniel 2:21** that **“He removes kings and sets up kings,”** the stature was Nebuchadnezzar's **defiant declaration** that as the king he sets up gods and removes them. And this is **the main point** of Daniel, chapter 3. It's **not** that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had great faith, which they did. In reality, they are merely supporting actors in this story.

This is about a **dramatic confrontation** between **the king who sets up gods** and **the God**

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<sup>2</sup> The Exposition of the text is largely adapted from *Daniel: Reformed Expository Commentary* by Dr. Ian Duguid, pages 45-60. Parts are adapted from *Daniel: Apollos Old Testament Commentary* by E.C. Lucas, page 93; and *Daniel: Tyndale Old Testament Commentary* by Joyce Baldwin, page 99. The comment on the musical instruments comes from *Daniel: Word Biblical Commentary* by John Goldingay, page 70.

who sets up kings. If you **miss that point**, then you miss the meaning of Daniel, chapter 3.

What's more, the location of the statue is significant. It was, verse 1, "*on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.*" The plain of Babylon was the location for the building on the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. The Tower of Babel was a defiant attempt to make a name for the people who built it as a lasting legacy to their own glory and also to prevent the people from being scattered throughout the earth.

Nebuchadnezzar and his golden image have the same goals in mind. It was designed to establish a lasting monument to his own glory and to provide a unifying focus for his kingdom. This is why we have these lists of various officials — not just the local officials from Babylon, but leaders and rulers **from throughout the empire** — who are now gathered together before the statue. This occasion is a public statement that the unity of Nebuchadnezzar's empire is rooted in the common worship of this image, a religious unity built around this 'god,' which, by the way, Nebuchadnezzar is willing to enforce with the death penalty.

Now, before we set up Nebuchadnezzar as the worst guy ever, we don't have to go back very far to see similar things that have happened in our own day and age. Every totalitarian regime in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century had statues erected in honor of their own tyrant. Whether it was statues of Lenin in the Soviet Union, statues of Mao in China, or statues of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, people had to pay homage to these statues if they wanted to advance in society, and in some cases, simply to stay alive. Usually one was allowed to keep believing in whatever 'god' they wanted as long as it was subordinate to the empire. Allegiance to the state was more important than allegiance to any god.

Our society is certainly different in that we don't have a dictator, and nobody, at least not yet, is threatening to shoot us or toss us into a fiery furnace. But in some ways our society is actually worse, mostly because its pressure is very subtle and sometimes we don't even realize it's going on. **Our culture** places the same type of pressure on each one of us to **put God in second place**. We find ourselves constantly pressed to keep our beliefs private ... and secondary. We can believe whatever we want as long as we don't ever talk about it.

Anyway, back to Daniel 3. It seems, at first, that Nebuchadnezzar's golden image was accomplishing its purpose successfully. This diverse group of officials came in response to his decree, a point underlined by repeating the long list of the officials' titles. This is important because they were not there merely as political rulers, but as representatives of, verse 4, "*peoples, nations, and languages.*"

And then when this cacophony of different instruments blared out — by the way, some commentators point out that Daniel 3 is kind of making fun of pagan worship here, since none of these instruments were used individually in Israel's worship, let alone in such a bizarre orchestra — anyway, when the music started, verse 7, "*all the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.*" And for a moment, the whole world was united in bowing down to Nebuchadnezzar's statue.

And yet, there's always a few guys who just can't get with the program, and so we hear about ...

### v. 8-12: THE **ACCUSATIONS** AGAINST THE Jews<sup>3</sup>

"Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews.<sup>9</sup> They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever!<sup>10</sup> You, O king, have made a

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<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther quote comes from *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* by Roland Bainton, page 61.

*decree, that every man who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image.* <sup>11</sup> *And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace.* <sup>12</sup> *There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, pay no attention to you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."*

At this point, some of the Babylonian officials came forward and revealed a **small detail** that had been previously passed over. So while the whole world was bowing before Nebuchadnezzar's image of gold, one small group of three men had resisted the decree, standing with unbowed heads at the crucial moment. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego — or Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, to give them their proper Hebrew names — had failed to bow down and worship the statue, thereby disrespecting not only the statue but the king as well.

They were accused of **ingratitude**, verse 12, "*There are certain Jews whom you have appointed,*" and **impiety**," *they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."* But the fundamental element of both these charges was their offense against Nebuchadnezzar himself.

But that's not how Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego saw it.

They were simply trying to be obedient to the commandment, **Exodus 20:4-5a**, "*You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.* <sup>5</sup> *You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God ..."*

It's worth noting that there were only three men in the whole crowd who refused to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's statue. We don't know where Daniel was, the text doesn't say, we can only presume that he was back in the capital city running the empire. But this highlights the fact that sometimes standing up for God can be a lonely activity. And it doesn't matter if you're standing on the national stage or you're simply visiting with all your unbelieving relatives who think you're some sort of moronic freak. There are times in life when doing what's right means you can't hide in the crowd.

The classic example from church history is seen in the life of Martin Luther, the great reformer who has all the best quotes. He was called in front of the church authorities and told to abandon his teaching on justification by faith alone. And Luther boldly declared, "Unless I'm convicted by Scripture and plain reason ... my conscience is captive to the Word of God, I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen."

And there were tremendous consequences for Martin Luther for standing up to the accusations against him. And there's tremendous consequences for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego for standing up to the accusations against them.

And whenever you have to stand up to others because of your faith, you need to understand that you will have to face ...

#### **v. 13-18: THE CONSEQUENCES OF FAITH**

*"Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king.* <sup>14</sup> *Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, "Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up?"* <sup>15</sup> *Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the*

*image that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?"*<sup>16</sup> Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.<sup>17</sup> *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.*<sup>18</sup> **But if not**, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

When this matter is brought to the king's attention, he immediately flew into a furious rage at the challenge to his authority and national unity. Nebuchadnezzar puts them on the spot and asks them if this is true, but without giving them time to answer, he sets before them a choice. If, when the music sounds, they were willing to bow down and worship the image he had made, their lives would be spared; however, verse 15, "*But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?"*"

Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego respond to the king's challenge with one of their own, verses 17-18, "*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.*<sup>18</sup> **But if not**, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

No one reading Daniel can seriously suggest that God's power to save His people from the fire **is ever in doubt** in this book. So here the question in the minds of these three men was not whether God was able to rescue them, but whether or not rescuing them was part of His plan. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego aren't presuming to predict the outcome. They understood that since God is sovereign, it's His choice whether to be glorified in their deaths or in their deliverance. Either way it doesn't affect their decision, because God is going to be glorified. And therefore, they're going to remain faithful.

Now, most of us would think or wonder, if this happened to me, how would I react? Would I be as faithful as these three? Or would I cave under the pressure?

First of all, God hasn't promised to give us the grace to face all the desperate situations we can **imagine**. He's promised to sustain us **only** in those situations He **actually** brings us into. He **doesn't** promise that we'll be able to **imagine** how we could go through the fire, but He **does** promise that if He leads us through the fire, He'll give us sufficient grace at that time.

Secondly, I've come to see this same battle being fought daily in my heart over **much lesser issues**. Am I going to declare the Lord to be my primary allegiance, come what may, or will I bow to the multitude of idols that the world presents? Unless you're an actor, our idols aren't usually golden statues. Our idols are the various pleasures, desires, and attitudes that the culture tells me I need to have in order to live a fulfilled and worthwhile life.

For some, their golden image is the respect and admiration and acceptance of others. For a lot the young adults here, high school and college, there's the pressure to be part of the "in-crowd," even though the cost of admission to this club is that we shouldn't show respect to our parents, or talk about God, or keep ourselves pure until marriage. This image of acceptance says, "Bow to me or I'll throw you into the fiery furnace of the mockery and ridicule of your peers."

Pastors feel the demands of this idol just as much as anyone else. We're constantly bombarded by mailings saying the measure of our success is the size of our church. And they say if we just toned down "the whole Bible thing," got a lot more flashy and fun, then we could

get more people and be more successful.

Recently I was at a conference of sorts and someone there, knowing I was a Pastor, asked me, “How’s your church doing?” This is evangelical speak for “How many people you got?” But I just answered, obviously incorrectly, “Church is going well, thanks for asking.” So then he had to actually ask, “How many people you got?” Whereupon I said, with a straight face, “250,000 ... more or less.”

And he just **stared** at me ... and then he said, “**Really?**”

And I said, “No. But people usually want to hear a really impressive number and that one sounded pretty impressive to me.”

He probably thinks I’m totally nuts and won’t ever set foot in our church.

I did, however, get some looks from a few people there who knew me, that were those “Are you causing trouble again?” kind of looks. Apparently I cause enough trouble that I now recognize those kinds of looks.

Our idols can be anything from food to drink to sex to romantic daydreams to ambitions to wealth and power. In fact, our hearts are all the more condemned by the **smallness** of the pressure under which we cave in and bow down. For most of us, it’s not the grand declaration that, come what may, we’ll never bow down to the idols of our hearts. **We’re not like** Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Instead, we slip almost unthinkingly into daily submission to our idol’s demands ... just like the rest of the crowd on the plain of Babylon.

We pay no consequences for our faith, because we take no stands for our faith. But not so Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They trusted God, faced the consequences, and saw ...

#### **v. 19-30: THE DELIVERANCE BY GOD**

*“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. <sup>20</sup> And 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. <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace.*

*<sup>24</sup> Then King 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.” <sup>25</sup> 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 a son of the gods.”*

*<sup>26</sup> Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace; 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. <sup>27</sup> And the satraps, the prefects, 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. <sup>28</sup> 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 serve and worship any god except their own God. <sup>29</sup> 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, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way.”*<sup>30</sup> *Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.”*

So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego get thrown into the fiery furnace. But when Nebuchadnezzar went to look into the fire, he not only saw that they were free and unharmed, but that they were joined by a fourth person, of whom he said, *“the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods.”*

The question of whether this fourth person is a Christophany (an appearance of the pre-incarnate Christ) or merely a visit by an angel isn't clear in the text. In either case, however, it is a physical demonstration of God's **presence** with believers in their distress. God didn't simply rescue His servants from the fire, He sent a personal emissary to pass through the fire with them. And as a result of His presence with them, they come out unharmed.

And because of this miracle, Nebuchadnezzar was forced to bless the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. But notice that Nebuchadnezzar says, verse 28, *“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 serve and worship any god except **their own God**.”*

However, Nebuchadnezzar doesn't claim this God as his own.

He says it's 'their God,' not 'my God.' His heart was not changed.

There's a great irony, here. We see that the ones who obeyed Nebuchadnezzar's commands died, while those he condemned emerged alive.

The issue was clearly not whether Israel's God can keep His servants alive, but whether Nebuchadnezzar can.

Now I have asthma and I can immediately tell if someone's smoking anywhere near me. Even if they're not smoking at the time, I can usually tell if they've even been around someone smoking. And unless it's got a really big dining room, I don't go to restaurants that allow smoking.

But here, these men emerge not just **unharmed**; their clothes **didn't even** have the smell **of smoke on them**, which **to me** is a powerful testimony to the comprehensiveness of their salvation by God.

This experience was a fulfillment of prophecy from **Isaiah 43:1-3**, *“But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.”*<sup>2</sup> *When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.”*<sup>3</sup> *For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.”* It's in the midst of these trials that God promises that His people can count on **His presence with them**.

Once again, there's a final note that we **can't** afford to miss in all of this. And that's the reminder that Jesus is ...

#### **CONCLUSION: God with us**

That commitment to be with us, no matter how bad the circumstance, finds its richest fulfillment in the coming of Christ. And we learn from **Matthew 1:23**, *“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).”*

He took on flesh and dwelt among us, experiencing all the temptations and pressures of

this world, and yet did not sin. Jesus felt the full range of the pain and sorrow of life in a fallen world, touching lepers, weeping at Lazarus' tomb, dealing with grief. However, even this humbling of Himself wasn't sufficient. To complete the process, Jesus was Himself accused and condemned to death, and then nailed to a cross.

Yet Jesus went through his own personal furnace completely alone. God was with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fire, and we have His promises to be with us in our trials, but on the cross Jesus felt the utter aloneness of total abandonment by God. When He passed through the waters, there was no one by His side. When the fire of God's wrath blazed over Him unchecked, He was alone. There was no companion to share His burden, no angel sent to relieve His agony, no saving hand from God reaching down to preserve Him in His hour of greatest need. For Jesus, there was no deliverance from the power of death.

Now why would God be with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, but not with His own Son? Why would He be faithful to His promise to be with sinners, and then abandon His only Son? You'd expect it to be the other way around.

The answer to that question is that on the cross Jesus was taking on Himself the fiery pain that we deserve for our idolatry. Unlike Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, I'm no hero of the faith. Everytime I bow to the idols of my heart, I merit God's judgment. Yet, God took all of the fiery judgment we deserve and laid it on His Son. He paid the price for me on the cross so that I might pass through the fire unburned and emerge safely out on the other side.

What's more, His perfect faithfulness is now credited to my account as if it were my own. A faithfulness that far exceeds that of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego is now mine as a free gift.

**That's what the Book of Daniel's about. This is a Gospel book and it's about celebrating the One who went through the fire of God's wrath ... alone ... and in our place: Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer; Immanuel, God with us.**

Think about that. You need to pray.

Take a moment to do that, and then I'll close.

*Heavenly Father, we thank You for the sacrifice of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. As we continue to study Daniel over the next few months, we pray that You would enable us to live kingdom lives in a fallen world, demonstrating the reign of a Sovereign God to those around us. Help us to be aware of Christ's presence among us, for we ask it in His name, and for His glory. Amen.*

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### **1 Peter 4:12-14**

*"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup> But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed. <sup>14</sup> If you are insulted for the*

*name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.”*