



Daniel 3:1-18

Our God is Able to Deliver Us

NKJ Daniel 3:1 Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its width six cubits. He set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.

2 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.

3 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.

4 Then a herald cried aloud: "To you it is commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages,

5 "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;

6 "and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace."

7 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 worshiped the gold image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

8 Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and accused the Jews.

9 They spoke and said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever!

10 "You, O king, have made a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, shall fall down and worship the gold image;

11 "and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.

12 "There are certain Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego; 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."

13 Then Nebuchadnezzar, in rage and fury, gave the command to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. So they brought these men before the king.

14 Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the gold image which I have set up?"

15 "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?"

16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.

17 "If that is 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, O king.

18 "But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up."

I am not an overly sentimental guy, at least I don't think I am, but there are moments in a few Christian movies where the courage being displayed is so moving to me that I tear up and get all "verklemt." Two such moments immediately come to mind, the first is in the 1953 black and white movie "*Martin Luther*" where Luther is standing alone before the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Worms and he is asked to recant his teaching of the great biblical Solas, particularly Scripture Alone and Faith Alone, and he answers with those immortal words:

"my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise, God help me. Amen."

Another is in the film *the Hiding Place* where Papa Ten Boom is about to be loaded into a truck to go off to almost certain death, and he is offered a compromise by the Nazi officer, who asks him to give him his word that he will stop helping Jews and he can die in his bed, Papa Ten Boom simply answers ***"If I stay behind, I will open my door to anyone who knocks for help."***

That kind of display of uncompromising courageous faith in the face of authorities promising persecution and death for disobedience, always moves me more profoundly than I can say. That kind of display of profound love for Christ always leaves me with an immense yearning to have that kind of faith.

It's my belief that the scenes we have in this chapter of Daniel, if it were to be made into a movie would be just as profoundly moving, because here you have a display of courage, faith, love for God that is so uncommon in this day and age - even amongst professing Christians.

I mean consider what is going on here. Nebuchadnezzar, the most powerful man on earth, the ruler of the seemingly unstoppable Babylonian empire sets up a golden image on the plain of Dura close to Babylon. Now his purpose in erecting this statue that *everyone* in his empire must bow before was most probably to try to create a unifying religion for the peoples of his empire. One of the problems that empires the size of Babylon had was that there were just too many differences amongst the various peoples in them; different geography, different customs, different languages, different gods. There was very little to give them a sense of all belonging to the same empire, and the more *different* they felt, the more likely they were to rebel.

The Romans had the same problem, and they tried to solve it in part by getting everyone in the empire to worship the Emperor. So regardless of whether you were a Gaul or a Greek or an Italian, once a year you were supposed to publicly burn a pinch of incense to Caesar and make the confession "***Caesar is Lord***". Then you got a certificate showing you were a good Roman subject and could go off and worship whomever and however you pleased. For most members of the empire it wasn't a big deal, they worshipped many idols, one more couldn't hurt, it was only a pinch of incense and a few words, besides the downside of *not* proving your loyalty by doing your act of obeisance was huge. It could cost you your freedom or even your life.

So Nebuchadnezzar is going to unify his empire around this ritual of worship offered to this gold overlaid image he has set up, it's possible that he got the idea for a golden statue from being told that he was the head of Gold in his dream in the previous chapter, in his own inflated ego took over.

Regarding the previous chapter, some of you are probably wondering how is it that this King who had confessed to Daniel ***“Truly your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets”*** could do that? Well, you have to remember that Nebuchadnezzar didn't stop being a polytheist or an idolator at that point. Remember, an encounter with God's truth doesn't always make someone a Christian - ***“Note, Strong convictions often come short of a sound conversion. Many... have owned the absurdity and dangerousness of sin, and yet have gone on in it.” – Matthew Henry***

In fact 3 times he will be confronted with the awesome power of God, but it is not until he himself is broken that he will renounce his idolatry.

So Nebuchadnezzar sets up the image, and calls for this huge dedication ceremony, where all the officials and potentates small and large from around his empire assemble outside the capital city, there they all are - thousands of them, all standing before this 90 foot tall golden statue and then at a signal this enormous orchestra consisting of instruments from all the different cultures of the empire (you see, Nebuchadnezzar invented the seeker sensitive praise band!) starts playing to indicate its time to worship and then the entire assembly, from the highest king to the lowest clerk, bows down to the ground, and on that entire plain only three men (I sometimes wonder where they all together or in different spots) Meshach, Shadrach, and Abednego, are left standing. Now if Daniel had been there, it would have been four, but in this case, only these three were present. ***But what courage, when the entire world is bowing down, including your own countrymen, for three young men, probably still teenagers, to remain upright. What image of true faith that was!***

Their act of defiance provides an opportunity for the “wise men” who were rankled by the quick elevation of these young men over them and that is even though it was the prayers of these men that had saved the Chaldeans from the sword

VERSE 12 - ““There are certain Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego; 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.”

So Nebuchadnezzar calls for them, and even though he is furious at being defied he wants to give them a way out, *is it true you won't worship my image?* He even says, look I'll give you a second chance to prove your loyalty before these people, we'll reenact the ceremony, you bow down, everything will be hunky dory. And at this point he probably expects – *who in his right mind would refuse to obey to my face, especially when a hideous death in the fire of the furnace is next door?*

But their answer is an even greater display of faith than what happened on the plain. They say, “look we aren't going to try to talk our way out of this, we admit we won't serve your gods or bow before your image, and regarding the furnace, we aren't afraid, because in answer to your question, our God is able to deliver us from being burned up and we are confident He will.” But then notice what they say, ***“even if He chooses not to, we won't serve your gods or bow to your image.”*** We love God so much we would rather die than dishonor the true God!

Now I know the applications of this to your life may seem remote, *“no king is forcing me to bow down before idols”* but friends, there are direct parallels in your own time to each part of this story.

First, the bowing down on the plain: I think we lose track of how many times the culture plays the tune and we are expected to bow down in response. *Evolution, Abortion, Marriage, Homosexuality, Pluralism, Rampant Immorality, Blasphemy, the Occult, Materialism, Nihilism, Feminism, all the thousands of “isms” in the pop culture that stand opposed to the Christian faith.*

Again and Again at work, in the public square, in school, we are expected to bow down and do our obeisance before these idols or we face ridicule or being ostracized. For many Christian young people nothing is worse than that idea. Now for me it’s my highest ideal, but for a lot of people I’ve spoken to, the idea that everyone around you would be bowing down and you would be the only one left standing is *terrifying*. Most people, Christian or not, have a desire to fit in, to be approved of and accepted, to feel like good and normal citizens - to just get along.

And if you stand, there are going to be consequences, just a little while ago for instance, a scientist and editor at the Smithsonian was hounded out of his job because he had published a peer reviewed article by an advocate of intelligent design that dared to point out that evolution could not even begin to explain the sudden appearance of all kinds of life-forms in what scientists call “*the Cambrian explosion*” the EEOC even found him to be the victim of workplace harassment and active discrimination, but that didn’t change a thing.

So people bow down, “its just a little bow after all, just a little pinch of incense, just a few words. Doesn’t mean anything.”

Really? Ok, what if once a year, in front of your spouse and your entire family you had to go up to another person and give them a big sloppy kiss and say “*I love you most of all*” do you think that would be nothing? What do you think your spouse would say?

No the early Christians knew better, they knew that to burn that pinch of incense and to say “Caesar is Lord” would be an act of unfaithfulness to Christ, just as Martin Luther knew it when he was tested, and Caspar Ten Boom knew it when he was offered the opportunity to bow. So they remained standing regardless of the consequences.

2) But if we are going to suffer, how can we stand? The Throne Room Confession explains that:

We can stand in that day not because we are supermen, remember those were just teenage boys in that throneroom, we can stand ***Because our God is able to deliver us.*** Remember those were just That was Paul’s experience again and again

2 Cor. 1:9 Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead,

10 who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us,

I can confess that that has been my experience as well, whenever I have stood, and done the right thing by faith, even though there has been conflict or even persecution it has been used for my good. But I cannot think of a single time I have bowed to an idol that it has really been a benefit to me.

And remember, Christ has proven his ability to deliver you from worldly affliction, from the furnaces here on earth by his willingness to suffer on your behalf so that you might be delivered from so great a death, the furnace that never stops burning.

As David found in his time of great affliction when he too was all alone:

Psalm 56:11 In God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?