

## **The sermon**

### **Intro**

How do we interact with ungodly authority? When do we obey? When do we resist? Where do we draw the line?

Are my prayers for a miracle going unanswered because I'm not trusting God enough? Is it ever appropriate to concede the possibility God might not act for me?

We've got plenty of application in Daniel 3.

### **Body**

#### **Point 1: Decree announced (3:1-7)**

##### **READ 3:1-7**

##### **Image (3:1)**

Some unknown amount of time has passed since Daniel revealed the king's dream.

King Nebuchadnezzar decides to make a golden image that's approximately nine feet wide and 90 feet tall.

What the image was and why Nebuchadnezzar decided to create the image are not revealed. These details aren't necessary for our edification.

##### **Attendees (3:2-4)**

Nebuchadnezzar rounds up government officials to celebrate with him the golden image he's made (3:2). The list moves from higher authority to lower authority. Satraps ruled over large regions in the kingdom. Others listed include advisors, finance directors, judges, police force (magistrates).

Various nationalities (3:4) are present because Nebuchadnezzar made use of captured peoples, putting them into service for his kingdom. Daniel for example.

##### **The decree (3:5-6)**

When numerous instruments go off it's time to bow (3:5).

***And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace."*** – 3:6

Failure to comply will not be tolerated. Death by cremation.

**"fall down and worship"** = get off your feet and lie face down on the ground.

##### **Compliance**

Apparently there's total compliance (3:7). Diverse ethnicities with diverse religious beliefs have no problem bowing on command.

##### **Application**

Not like America where there's laws to protect the rights of citizens. In Babylon, whatever the king says goes.

What we have here is a tyrant without regard for human life issuing a command. He has the power to enforce it. He won't give you a trial. There won't be a series of appeals. There won't be a riot or calls to defund the police. No one's going to resist with you. No one shares your convictions. You're all alone.

When faced with a law that can't be violated and a punishment that can't be averted, the peoples comply. The pressure's something like this. I'll go along with the crowd. There's no other choice, right? All the other religions give in, right?

The picture is those with biblical convictions are confronted with a choice. Will I preserve my life or obey God? Will I give my allegiance to man's law or God's law? What's it gonna be?

## **Point 2: Rebels uncovered (3:8-12)**

### **READ 3:8-12**

#### **Witnesses**

Witnesses come forward with information professing their allegiance: *"O king, live forever!"* (3:9).

*"You, O king, have made a decree"* (3:10) = identifying the exact offense.

*"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"* (3:12). What an insult to your dignity! What shameful treason!

#### **Culprits identified**

*There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.* – 3:12

Some individuals put their life on the line by ignoring the decree. There wasn't total conformity.

#### **Editorial comment**

*"Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews."* – 3:8

That's motives revealed. That's intent to harm. The Chaldeans would be the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, astrologers (2:2, 27) that were unable to reveal the king's dream.

They were jealous of the Jews' superior wisdom and elevation to higher positions in the government.

#### **Application**

The picture is Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego have been outed by their opponents.

God's blessing (wisdom, promotion) resulted in enemies. Devotion to God resulted in enemies. Faithfulness can result in success and opposition at the same time. God blesses in the midst of opposition.

The picture is costly devotion exists side by side with God's blessing. We can be suffering and blessed at the same time!

## **Point 3: Rebels stand firm (3:13-18)**

### **READ 3:13-18**

#### **Nebuchadnezzar's response**

Nebuchadnezzar was *"in furious rage"* (3:13). Mission accomplished. They knew how to push the king's buttons. Nebuchadnezzar's the guy you can wind up in a second.

So he brings them in for questioning (3:13-14).

***"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? – 3:14***

Nebuchadnezzar wants to make sure the accusations are true.

***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.***

The rage monster's willing to forgive. A second chance extended. Likely there's an affection for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego because they excelled in wisdom (1:20) and the Jews' God was able to reveal the king's dream (2:47). He's hoping these assets recant.

***But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace.***

There will only be one second chance.

***And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?"***

He knows their God can reveal dreams but he doesn't know the extent of Yahweh's might. Revealing dreams is different than direct intervention.

Nebuchadnezzar didn't think it possible for Yahweh to interfere here. It's a brash statement. His worldview doesn't allow for the possibility.

In chapter two we learned Babylon's gods don't reveal mysteries. Apparently, they don't intervene in human affairs either. He's ignorant of the Creator God who rules over his creation and is actively involved in the affairs of men.

### **Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego response**

***"O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. – 3:16***

We don't have to defend our actions. We don't need to apologize. We accept your punishment.

***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. – 3:17***

If you must toss us in the fire, our God is so mighty that he's able to rescue us from your hand. Our God is more powerful than you! There's a sense of confidence that God will rescue. He's helped them before.

***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." – 3:18***

There's a sense that, while God is able, he may not will to rescue us. We know that God is able, but we don't know what God has chosen to do. Regardless, we will serve our God either way. This I would suggest is the essence of biblical faith!

### **Application**

But why not just bow and move on?

To obey Nebuchadnezzar would be to violate the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> of the Ten Commandments.

***"You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God" (Exodus 20:5).***

To obey Nebuchadnezzar would be flagrant disobedience against God. To obey God would be flagrant disobedience against Nebuchadnezzar. You can't obey both. You need to choose one over the other. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego chose God.

## BIG IDEA

**Even if it hurts me, I'm going to do what God says.** This is biblical faith.

The idea is "*We must obey God rather than men*" (Acts 5:29). Faith in Jesus entails allegiance to God always takes precedence.

Our default response is obey the government and its laws.

*Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. <sup>2</sup> Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. – Romans 13:1-2*

In most cases, rebelling against government is rebelling against God. Rejecting authority is usually sin.

However, in some cases, rebelling against governing authorities is required. Nebuchadnezzar was requiring sin. Bowing before images. When the government requires sin disobey. Faith also requires that when the government prevents obedience disobey. Daniel refused to stop praying in Daniel 6.

**So we obey our authorities unless they command sin or prevent obedience.** The Christian doctor commanded to perform transgender surgery or abortion defies their boss and entrusts themselves to God. Christians in the Middle East continue to evangelize Muslims despite laws against doing so. **We obey government unless they command sin or prevent obedience.**

This doesn't mean we're free to disobey because of personal preference and convictions. **We only disobey when they command sin and prevent disobedience.** So we pay our taxes even when our tax dollars go to ungodly expenses. Paul commanded the Christians to pay taxes in Romans 13:7 and Roman tax dollars went to ungodly expenses. So we obey the traffic laws and mask rules. Because wearing a mask isn't a sin. And wearing a mask doesn't prevent me from obeying God.

**The default Christian response is submission to authority.** Parents. Teachers at school. Employers. Law enforcement. Elders in the church. God has baked authority into our world. Ultimately, we're designed to submit to God's authority. Earthly authority points to divine authority.

## Temptations

Pressure brings temptation so questions arise like...

Does God's word actually say that? Is there a way to make Scripture compatible with bowing to the image? Won't bowing to the image and preserving my life be better for gospel witness?

There're many ways to rationalize what is clear and obvious in the Bible. Don't rationalize. Just trust and obey. Leave the fallout to God.

## A balanced faith

The faith I'm after as a pastor is...

- 1) God is able to do the impossible, so I pray.
- 2) God may or may not act for me, so I submit to his will.
- 3) God is still good and wise and in control even if he doesn't act for me.
- 4) I know God is good to me, regardless, because of the cross.
- 5) I'll serve him whatever may be.
- 6) Whatever he brings into my life, he'll strengthen me. (so he does act for me when he doesn't act as I desire!)

Apply this to things like your cancer or your loved one's cancer. Yes easier said than done.

#### **Point 4: Rebels rescued (3:19-27)**

##### **READ 3:19-27**

##### **Rage resumed**

Nebuchadnezzar's face changed. Body language. So he says heat up the furnace seven times more than usual (3:19). That's exaggeration. Cremation processes in America range from 1,400-2,000 degrees Fahrenheit. You can't get the chamber to 14,000 degrees.

##### **Into the fire**

The fire's lit and they're in the fire. *"the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego"* (3:23). Their escorts was burned.

##### **Miracle**

Nebuchadnezzar was peering in through the door and noticed an unbound 4<sup>th</sup> man in the fire with them (3:24-25). And none were hurt. Fire without effect. Miracle.

*"a son of the gods"* indicates a divine being or an angel.

There's debate here. Options include an angel. The angel of the Lord = God himself. The pre-incarnate Jesus. Identity is unclear. The point is miraculous rescue by God.

Nebuchadnezzar calls them out, calling them *"servants of the Most High God"* (3:26). Nebuchadnezzar believes in a multitude of deities, but Yahweh is greater than the rest.

Numerous officials witness that the fire never even touched their hair or clothing. Thus the emphasis on clothing in 3:21. Divine rescue. Miracle.

##### **Application**

Sometimes suffering ends in death. The gateway to God's presence for the believer. Sometimes God rescues from suffering. Sometimes God sustains in suffering. In Acts 12, James the brother of John is killed with the sword while Peter is rescued from prison by an angel. It's up to God to decide.

Faith never presumes the outcome. Faith obeys in the unknown.

#### **Point 5: Decree altered (3:28-30)**

##### **READ 3:28-30**

Nebuchadnezzar's learning.

*"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. – 3:28"*

Nebuchadnezzar gets it. God sets aside the king's command. God acts for his people. God's people refuse to worship other gods.

Christians don't worship Allah or any of the Hindu gods because there's only one true God who created everything. The Creator demands that only he be worshipped. God doesn't want figments of the human imagination being praised for his works.

Which one of you would want a fictitious being to be praised for the meal you cooked or the painting you crafted or the house you built? That's what idolatry's like.

### **Decree overturned**

It was put away your religious commitments and bow to my image. Now it's don't say anything against Yahweh. Yahweh is unique. No false god can resist the most powerful ruler in the world. But Yahweh can.

Nebuchadnezzar had asked, "*And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?*" (3:15). He got his answer.

### **Gospel Connection/Conclusion**

God rescues those who trust in him.

The Bible warns of a "*fiery furnace*" to come (Matt 13:41-42, 49-50). A place characterized by "*weeping and gnashing of teeth.*" The fruit of sin against the Creator God is re-location to a place of conscious suffering. Without end.

Jesus went to the cross to save a people for himself. Dying so that everyone who believes might be saved from the fiery furnace. Jesus says to you, trust me, turn to me, and your sins will be forgiven and you'll be heirs of eternal life. You'll be welcomed into my kingdom where sin and suffering and death are a thing of the past. The good news is God is merciful to sinners. Turn from your sins by trusting in Jesus' death and his resurrection.

God allows his people in the Middle East to be executed and he allows his people in America to get cancer. Christians still think he's good. How is this? Because Jesus died in our place, suffering the Father's white hot wrath against sin so that we could be forgiven and heirs of the kingdom.

God is good in suffering in the place of sinners. God is good in forgiving sinners. God is good in ending the suffering of all who believe. God is good because he rescues every sinner who turns to him!