

Daniel 3 • The fiery furnace, a test of real faith

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Daniel chapter three. I think this chapter has more to do with the world we're living in today than we even perhaps realize. We'll see. Daniel three. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, minister to our hearts this evening through Your Word, and let this Word speak to us at the place of our greatest need. You know us, Lord, every inch of us. You know every thought, every concern, every fret, every grief, every joy, every thought and desire of our hearts.

We pray that you would meet us at the place of, I guess just our need for you Lord. We pray that you'd speak to us tonight, that you would equip us. Challenge us. Fill us, Lord, with your Spirit. Give us ears to hear. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.

For those of you that have been following along with our study, you know that last week we covered Daniel chapter two, of course. And in that chapter, we dealt with the whole issue of Nebuchadnezzar, his dream that Daniel was able to interpret for him, in fact even tell him what the dream was. And that was all about a huge statue you'll remember. And Nebuchadnezzar saw this statue, this enormous statue that was very frightening to him.

And it had a head of gold and it had arms and a chest of silver and then it had a belly and thighs of bronze, or as some bibles say, brass. And then there were the legs of iron. And then you remember there was the feet that were made up of iron and also soft clay. And we learned from each of those materials, there was a representation there of both the current and then successive gentile world powers that would come to prominence in the years leading up to the time of the Messiah and even beyond.

And that was probably a pretty heady thing. We talked about this last week, that Nebuchadnezzar heard the statement from Daniel as he's interpreting this dream. Oh, king, you are the head of gold. And of course, Nebuchadnezzar would've known what that meant. The gold being the metal that was the most glorious, frankly, of all of them.

And we talked about whether that would be something that King Nebuchadnezzar would allow to affect him. And we see as we get into chapter three that it did. Because we're told in verse one of this chapter that King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold whose height was 60 cubits and its breadth six cubits.

And that would mean, for those of you that don't think in terms of cubits, we're talking about a statue that's 90 feet tall and nine feet wide. I mean, this is absolutely huge. And we're told that he set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon, and that was obviously in a place that everybody could see it.

So this is pretty interesting what's going on in, in Old Nebie's heart and mind, related to building this huge, enormous statue. Obviously in his own honor I want to show you Harry Ironside and his commentary on Daniel summed up nicely what's happening. Let me show you this on the screen, he says,

“We see how little Nebuchadnezzar had learned from the revelation God had made to him. For we see that he was not humbled by the revelation made. Instead, it led him to exalt himself as one, especially favored of Heaven; it magnified his thoughts of the human mind and his own greatness.”

– **H.A. Ironside**

We're reminded of something very important. That a heavenly revelation or vision from God is not necessarily a guarantee of a godly response by the receiver. If the person who is receiving this revelation from God doesn't respond with humility, then it could only end up causing them to be puffed up. You'll recall that the Apostle Paul was also the recipient of a heavenly vision and revelation from God. Let me show you his comments from Second Corinthians, chapter 12. He says,

2 Corinthians 12:2-4, 7 (ESV)

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.

² *I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows.* ³ *And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—* ⁴ *and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. (And then he goes, now, he talks about it in the first person. He says,)* ⁷ *So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.*

Have you ever gotten into a debate with anybody about what Paul's thorn was? Do you know that that misses the whole point of the passage? People love to argue, “What do you think the thorn was?” And we forget that's not the point. The point is it was given to keep his feet firmly planted on the ground, rather than becoming puffed up and conceited about the fact that he had been elevated to receive this revelation or vision, from God.

And that's the point of what we're dealing with here with Nebuchadnezzar as well. The point is that he was filled with pride, and so we're told in verse two then Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather the satraps. By the way, have you ever heard about a satrap before? Before I read Daniel chapter three, satrap never came into my head. I was like, what's a satrap? Is there anything close to a mouse trap?

Well, I found out that it's actually the reason we don't know is because it was a very unique term used for the Persians. They kind of coined it and it was some kind of protector of the realm. We're not really sure how he functioned in that role. But these were some kind of protectors. And then you've got prefects, which was kind of a chief officer of some type and governors and counselors and 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.

And so you can see here, that Nebuchadnezzar wanted to make a very big deal of this thing because he invites all of these very important people to gather for this dedication thing. And it says,

³ *“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.”*

And it's interesting, we do get some repetition in these verses about these, once they name all of these officials, you would think they could just say, and then all those guys. And just kind of move on with the story. But they don't, they keep repeating all of the names of these officials. But the repetition is there to give emphasis. It's to lend emphasis to the fact that this was an event of grandeur and tremendous importance.

And that's why the Bible will go through and repeat things from time to time, almost in a way for you and me, we look at it and we're kind of like, what in the world? But there's a reason to it. And So it says in verse four that,

⁴“... *the herald*, (and that's someone who gives the message of the king. His name isn't Harold. That's his title) *proclaimed aloud*, “*You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages*, ⁵ *that when you hear the sound* (and here we go) *of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe*, (you might have different names for these in your Bible if you're reading a different translation) *and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up*. ⁶ *And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace.*”

There you go. Wouldn't it be fun just to live in Babylon during that time? And have kings that give those kinds of edicts? I have this beautiful golden statue I made, and I'm going to have all these musicians every so often just start playing. And when you hear that music, I want you to get down on the ground, and I want you to worship the statue. Or and if you don't, things are going to get really hot for you.

So we have this demand given to all the people during the dedication ceremony, and this was obviously a test of allegiance. You've got to remember something about Babylon. It was inhabited by people who were not just Babylonians. It was inhabited by people from many nations. They had conquered many nations over the years. Judah, or if you will, Israel, because there were all the Israelites living there at the time, just one of them.

And there were many other nations that had been conquered. And So they're all living in the Babylonian empire. Well, how do you know who's really loyal? How do you know who's going to be obedient? How do you know who's going to just, if you say jump, they're going to say how high? Well, here's a good test. We'll just kind of see if they're willing to do this, and how loyal they are. And of course, Nebuchadnezzar made it clear that this was not a re if you failed to comply to this.

This is not a religious demand. This is a kingdom demand. And if you don't do it, this is treason. Okay? This is not just a religious choice; this is treason if you don't worship when the music plays. That's what Nebuchadnezzar considered it to be. To him, it was a test of loyalty to the empire, the kingdom of Babylon. What was it to the Jews?

It was a test of faith, wasn't it? It was a test of faith. And sometimes we go through tests of faith. We've talked about this before. We've talked about the fact that God does not tempt us. We've been learning in James on Sunday morning, but He will test us. He will test us, not tempt us. Let me show you on the screen what Peter has to say about testings. He said,

1 Peter 1:6-7 (ESV)

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

⁶*In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials,* ⁷*so that the (look at this, the) tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire— (you've got to wonder if Peter's thinking about the story in Genesis or rather in Daniel chapter three, he says), may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

And Peter, the epistles of Peter were written to believers who were having their faith tested and maybe not in a fiery furnace, but tested nonetheless, and they were going through that fiery test of their faith. And he talks about how these trials test the genuineness of our faith. Trials have a way of figuring out or finding out how, where your faith is at. It's kind of that barometer that helps us to see, well, how's my faith doing? Well, a good test comes along, and you find out real fast. Verse seven.

⁷*“Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, (By the way, the trigon is a, I found out I had to look it up. It's really just another kind of a harp. It was a harp in a triangle shape, and that's why they called it a trigon. Anyway, and I didn't know that the Scots had made their way into Babylon because we see there's a bagpipe there as well) and every kind of music, (Look, look at this. This is important. It says) all the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.”*

And So we can kind of see here that there was an immediate response of obedience among the people to the King's edict. And I want to stop there for just a moment, and I want to get your attention because I think we need to talk about this for just a minute, this immediate response, because I think there's some things that we need to realize. Now, don't fall off your chair when I say to you that I believe that the response of the people when they fell down and worshiped was one of faith.

I was waiting for your eyebrows to go up. Here's the deal. Those of us who are believers in Jesus, we tend to think of ourselves as people of faith, and then we tend to think of people who aren't believers, as people who have no faith. But actually, that's not the case. Unbelievers do have faith, and if you don't believe me, just go talk to somebody who believes in evolution.

They've got tons of faith. Frankly, more than I do. That's the fact of the matter. To say that unbelievers don't have faith is fundamentally untrue. Unbelievers have as much or sometimes more faith than do believers. Here's the difference. The object of our faith. The difference is the object of our faith, because you can go through life and as you do. I'm here to tell you, you're going to believe in something.

People love to you know who don't, who think Christians are dopeheads. They like to say, well, I'm not religious and I don't believe any of that stupid religious stuff. Yes, you do. Yes, you do. The object of your faith is different than mine, I'll grant you, but you believe, and you have faith and you are religious, from the standpoint of the things that you believe. Because you can put your faith in a lot of different things in this life. And people do.

I mean, some people put their faith in government, and some people put their faith in technology. If you don't believe me, then you've heard, haven't you, about how some people who realize they have some kind of a deadly disease will actually put themselves in cryostasis, hoping upon hope that technology is going to advance to the point one day that they will be able to, that medical science will be able to heal whatever disease they had and they'll be able to bring them back to life and reanimate them.

What a disappointment that must be when they wind up face-to-face, with the Lord of hosts, upon their death. They think they're just being frozen; they're just dying. But that's, that's faith in technology. I've met people who had faith in superstition. You can believe in fate; you can believe in education. A lot of people have put their faith in education. If we can just educate people, we can change everything. We can change the world.

But do you want to know what the most popular thing people put their faith in? Themselves. That's number one. Number one on the list. We, as human beings, if we don't have faith in God, we're going to put our faith ultimately in ourselves. You're going to put your faith in something. The question is always, on what is your faith founded? Okay?

And the reason that the people in Babylon obeyed and hit the ground face down and worshiped was because the edict of the king was the most real thing that they had to believe in. It topped any other faith or belief that they currently had. This was number one. So when the king gave his edict and said, worship or die. That was the top of the line for them on the faith level.

And So they hit the ground because they had faith that what the king said would be carried out. Do you understand? They believed with all their hearts that that would be the case. I want you to check out another quote here this time from Warren Wiersbe. I've always liked him, but he says,

“The worshipers of Daniel chapter three help us better understand the plight of people in today's world who don't know our Lord Jesus Christ. They blindly follow the crowd and build their lives on the false and the futile. Concerned only with survival, they'll do almost anything to escape danger and death, even to the point of selling themselves into slavery to men and the empty myths and promises I'll throw in that they promote.” - **Warren Wiersbe**

I agree with that. I agree with what Warren Wiersbe says there. That is the tendency of humankind, and when we're following the crowd, going the way of the world. It's different for us though. As believers, we put our faith in the God who has revealed himself through His Word, and ours is a hope that extends beyond this life and beyond this world and beyond the threats of this world. And beyond the demands of this world and beyond the false and empty promises of this world. Our faith goes beyond that, You see.

We have a greater hope than what this world can offer. And it drives us, and it stabilizes us. And it keeps us from falling on our face every time someone comes along and says, worship or die. As we're going to discover there were some in Babylon who believed in the God that we worship, and because of that, they had faith in something greater than the edict of the King. We'll read on and find out how that goes. Look at verse eight. It says,

⁸“Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews. ⁹They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, “O king, live forever! ¹⁰You, 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. ¹¹ And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace. (Well)

¹² There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province (You remember we read about that last week, Daniel, when he was exalted, he went before the king and said, I want you to also exalt these men) Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. (And the king did. And he exalted them to a place of being over the affairs of the province. And they mention these guys, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He says, they said) 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.”

¹³ “Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king. ¹⁴ Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, (So) “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? ¹⁵ 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?”

That was a dumb thing for him to say, wasn't it? I mean, every time somebody in the Bible says something like that, “who's going to save you?” Now it's like, oh dude, you just cooked your goose right there, right then and there. So anyway. Who's going to deliver you out of my hands? It's kind of like, almost Pilot. When he is saying to Jesus, “don't you realize I have the power to crucify you or set you free?” I love Jesus' response. Anyway. Verse 16, it says,

¹⁶ “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.

And by the way, it's kind of interesting language there. But what they mean there is, essentially, we don't need to defend God to you. That's what they're saying. Essentially. That's the essence of it. We don't need to defend God to you because God is perfectly able to defend himself. It always amazes me that there are some Christians that feel like they need to defend God. We're never told to defend God in the Word.

We are told that there is a defense of the Gospel, that's different. Right? But defending God is not necessary because God can defend Himself and if He

can't, he isn't much of a God, is He? It's always amazed me how some groups, if you say something negative about their God, they'll say, you're dead. We're going to kill you. It's like, really? Seriously? Your God can't stand up for himself. He has to have you do that for him. What does that say about your god? And so there, this is really kind of what they're saying. And we don't need to defend God related to this. Verse 17,

¹⁷“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.”

Now that statement, yes, it's one of faith, but I have to wonder if the Lord had spoken to these men in the midst of this trial and told them that they would be delivered. Because this is a very confident sort of a response. And the reason I say, well, you might say, well, pastor Paul, I don't know. I think it's just faith, isn't it? Well, yes, it is faith, but listen, there were a lot of people who had great faith, who stood for that faith, against the threat of death and went to their death.

I believe Peter had great faith. But he was crucified upside down and then set on fire. I believe the Apostle Paul had great faith, but he was beheaded. And we know that, the other apostles of the Lamb were met with a similar fate, all except for John. Although I got to tell you, they tried to kill John on a few occasions. It just didn't take.

So we can't go around and just say, that's just faith. I really, truly have to wonder here, if they received a revelation of some kind that the Lord was going to deliver them. Interesting though, that they go on to say in verse 18. But if not, now listen, that's not a lack of faith. They're not saying, But maybe He won't. I don't know. That's not what they're saying.

They're saying even if He didn't come to our rescue in this situation, that's what they're saying to Nebuchadnezzar. They say, “be it known to you,” and that's a way of just saying, listen, this needs to be really clear that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.

It doesn't matter. I have to wonder also if these men were holding rather tightly to a particular promise that was given to the people of Israel recorded in the book of Isaiah. Let me put this on the screen for you. It says,

Isaiah 43:1-2 (ESV)

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. 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."

So wonderful promise given from the Word of God. You've got to wonder. But I want you to remember too, and just really hold on tightly to that statement that they make in verse 18, these three men, our God will deliver us out of your hand. But then if not, even if He doesn't, we want you to know, we're still not going to turn.

That statement, I mean that strength of character and determination to walk in obedience to the Lord. I mean, it reminds us that we are called to obedience regardless of our feelings or regardless of the possible fallout. That's what they're saying. Even if He doesn't. Even if the fallout is really hard to take, we're still going to obey God. We want you to know that.

Do you understand that obedience? Our obedience gets tested along with our faith. When something comes up in our lives that gives us something to lose, something to lose. It's no big deal if somebody threatens you, to take something from you that you're not going to lose anything by having that thing taken away. Who cares?

Now, losing your life, that's a pretty big deal. At least, from the standpoint of an earthly perspective. It's a pretty big deal. But we are called to be obedient regardless of what the cost is. I want you to think about that for a minute. Regardless of the cost. You see, real faith, and the reason I call it real faith is because there's a lot of confusion in the body of Christ about what faith is.

But real faith, true faith, is a determination to simply trust the Lord and leave the rest for Him to work out the details. And there's always details. But when you ponder the details and you're worried about the details, how it's all going to work out in the end, that's going to affect your decision to walk in obedience.

But if you leave the details in His hands, that's going to free you up to simply follow the Lord and to say, I'm going to do this. I'm going to do this because I know that God's with me and He's going to take care of me. I know that He's going to take care of me. I have received many, many emails over the last year from people who were facing losing their job because of certain decisions that they were either making or unwilling to go along with in the world.

And often people would write me and say, pastor Paul, I don't know what to do. And then they would explain why. And you know what the why was? It was all the details. If I lose my job, da, da da, da, da, da, da, da da. See, that's not your

responsibility. Your responsibility is to follow your convictions and to follow the leading of the Lord. And He takes care of the da, da, da, da, da you see, along the way. You just walk in obedience.

And so my response is always the same to these people. What's God telling you to do? Don't think about how it's all going to work out in the end. That's God's responsibility. What is God telling you to do? Do that. And I don't tell people what to do. I don't tell people what I think they should do. I tell them to find out what God wants them to do and then do it. And leave all the yeah, but's at the door and trust the Lord to take care of His children because I've got news for you.

God knows how to take care of His children. He can do it. He can handle it. He's not sitting around going, now what am I going to do if you quit your job? Now what am I going to do? You leave me with no options. Do you really think God has no options or He is limited in some fashion? One other thing that I want to call to your notice before we move on, is that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are not just given an opportunity to show their faith, but they're also given an opportunity to share about who God is and what He is able to do.

But do you know how that opportunity came along? Persecution, trials. And did you know that persecution in trials almost always does that very thing? They give us an opportunity to share our faith or more specifically, in whom we have placed our faith. Let me show you something that Jesus said in recorded in Mark chapter 13:9. He said,

Mark 13:9 (ESV)

...you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them.

What is Jesus saying? You're going to get arrested. People are going to hate you. They're not going to like what you have to say. But here's the upside. You'll get a chance to share about me. Pretty cool, huh?

I would like to show you a picture of someone I wish, seriously, that I could pronounce her name, but I can't and I'm not even going to try. So that's why I put it actually on the picture so you could read it.



If anybody knows how to say that you come up, tell me after the service. But I'd like to introduce this woman to you. She is many things. She is a pastor's wife, she is a medical doctor, and her home is in the nation of Finland. In fact, as of point of interest, she served her nation politically as the Minister of the Interior. So she had a fairly authoritative position in the government of her nation. As you look at her picture, I'd like to share one other little tidbit about this woman.

She faces the possibility of six years in prison for the crime of telling people that God made marriage to be between one man and one woman. I'm not kidding you. So she is potentially going to prison for what they have charged her with as hate speech. If you write down her name, you can Google it for yourself.

And by the way, I'm not telling you this to make you upset or to raise your blood pressure about such things. I'm actually sharing this because of something she said that goes along with what Jesus said. You'll be taken before these people to share. Can I show you a quote? Here's what she said. She said,

“I had many times during these hours the possibility to tell to the police the message of the Gospel, what the Bible teaches about the value of human beings, that all people are created in the image of God and that is why they are all valuable.” It was like “giving Bible studies to the police,” she remarked.

That's the way she saw it. By the way, they interrogated her for 13 hours straight about her belief that God created marriage to be an institution between one man and one woman only. But what she's talking about here in this quote is exactly what Jesus said in Mark chapter 13, verse 9, when He said, they will bring you before the authorities.

Remember how Paul used to talk about that too? In fact, he wrote to some of the churches saying, you guys are not going to believe this. Let me tell you something. My incarceration has actually had some benefits, because as a result of me being in chains, he said, the whole palace guard and the whole, and all the royal people and everybody here, they've all heard the Gospel because I've been hauled in before people over and over to say why are you in chains, Paul?

And I get to tell them. It's because of Jesus. So here's the, I'm just giving you the upside of persecution, okay? Just in case you thought there was nothing but a downside, there's an upside. We get to tell people about the Lord. Why again, are you doing this? Why? Why are you here in chains? Why have you been arrested?

Well, let me tell you, let me tell you. Those kinds of things open doors for us to share our faith. All right, now we come to Nebuchadnezzar's response to this rather bold declaration of these three men. Verse 19. It says,

19" Then Nebuchadnezzar's was filled with fury," (and that's because proud people don't like to be disobeyed. And it tells us that,) 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. "

I had it brought to my attention while I was studying this, that that was the response of anger, not wisdom. Because if you really wanted to make these guys suffer, you wouldn't heat the furnace up you'd actually cool it down, so that their suffering would be elongated, or lengthened, right? As it is bringing, if he was really going to kill these guys, I mean, if God would've let them go, this would've been a very merciful way.

They'd have died like that. In fact, we're going to read here in a second that the guys who threw them in died. So I mean, really it was, this is nothing but anger making him do this. It didn't, it wasn't really all that smart, but that's, but it worked really well, and it played right into God's hands. Anyway, verse 20,

20 "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. ²¹ 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.

And by the way, this furnace would've been a smelting furnace. And they used smelting furnaces, and they had two openings. There was one in the top and there was a door, a doorway on the bottom. And they were used to smelt metals and purify metals, whatever the metal may be, and you would throw the metal in through the top, and then once the fire had done its work they would, and it cooled, they would open the door and then pull out the metal that had been purified.

So this is, this wasn't used as a torture device by the king, these were used to smelt metals. So anyway, that's what, I just to kind of give you a picture in your mind. So they throw them into the thing, verse 22,

²² “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. ²³ And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace. (Well, that's the end of the story. Let's close in prayer. We're not done, are we? No heavens no. Verse 24)

²⁴ “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.” ²⁵ He answered and said, “But I see four men (and I want you to take note of this word) 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.”

I find it very fascinating that the only thing that got burned up were the ropes that bound these men. That's it. It's the only thing that burned. There's a lesson there, I mean, that'll preach, won't it? Right. That'll preach right? Trust the Lord, and those things which bind will fall away. And by the way, who's the fourth person?

Well, I personally believe that we're seeing a preincarnate appearance of Jesus who walks through the fire. But it doesn't really matter whether it's specifically a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus or whether it's an angel. It really doesn't matter because God's behind it one way or the other. But isn't it interesting that we see that picture of the Lord walking through the fire with these men? Verse 26,

²⁶ “Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace; he declared, “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, (He kind of changed his tune, didn't he?) come out, and come here!” Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. ²⁷ 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.” (And),

²⁸ “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. ²⁹ Therefore I make a decree: (this is where the pagan in him kind of takes over and he starts talking) 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.”

And again, I don't know if they talked with the king after this and just kind of said, dude, did you understand anything that happened here today? But again, God doesn't need our defense. And God doesn't need Nebuchadnezzar to make a decree that anybody who says anything against him, should be torn limb from limb. That's just not necessary. God's able to defend Himself. Oh, and by the way, they got a promotion. That's the way the thing ends.

³⁰ Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (I hope they got a pay raise too. I really do) in the province of Babylon.

So what an incredible chapter, but there are several different lessons. We could probably sit here and go over lessons all night long. But I think the takeaways that are really important for us to see here, I mean, beyond the fact that we've been talking about faith and what real faith is, trusting and obeying even when we don't know what the end result's going to be and we may in fact be tempted to worry about the details of the end result, but just to trust and obey anyway.

But the other takeaway that I think very is very important here is that we need to understand God may not spare you from the fire, but if He doesn't, He promises to walk through it with you. And that's an important thing to remember. Sometimes we pray to be delivered from the fire and God knows that it's the fire that is needed actually to cut away those things, which bind us. That keep us bound.

Sometimes those things do fall away in the fire, and you find out that you come out from the fire on the other end and you're suddenly free from some of the things that bound you before you went through the fire. But the other lesson I want to bring out here is a little more, I suppose, tuned to our present-day experience and the growing opposition that we as Christians and followers of Jesus are sensing that is on the rise in the world.

And so along those lines, let me end with a final quote here, one once again from Warren Wiersbe. I think you'll find this interesting. He says,

**“As we move toward the end of the age, (and he's talking about the church age) the furnace of opposition will be heated, seven times hotter, and the pressure to conform will become stronger, and stronger. It will take a great deal of grace, prayer, courage, and faith for God's people to stand tall for Christ while others are bowing the knee to the gods of this world.
– Warren Wiersbe**

Warren Wiersbe is with the Lord now, but those are words that are just as applicable to our day right now and the days that are ahead. The furnace of opposition is being heated, isn't it? And we can get all afraid about it and we can sit and fret and we can think about, well how am I going to make it through?

Well he says, hey grace, we need more grace. We need to spend more time in prayer. We need to ask God for more courage and more faith in order to stand and to continue to stand and to say, I will not worship the gods of this world. And one of the gods that we have seen elevated in this last two years has been the god of fear.

And I'm not saying that you shouldn't be prudent, or you shouldn't be careful. I'm not saying that. You can be prudent and careful without being fearful. Because fear is a master, a task master, a slave owner. And when you bow to that god small g, he will control you. He will control you. And we as believers simply have to rise up and just say, not in a cocky sort of an arrogant way, but to say nonetheless, no, I already have a Master.

I already have a Lord. And my Lord is the Lord of all Lords. He's the King of all Kings, and I will bow to no other Lord and no other master, and that includes fear. I simply refuse. For I have pledged myself to another master. Let's pray.

Lord, those are bold words. Following them can be another situation altogether when the furnace starts to get hot. And we are tempted, Lord at those times to

fear for the future and wonder how things are going to possibly work out. How are we possibly going to live? How are we possibly going to get by?

Lord, we just take a moment here tonight to remember who you are. To be still and know that you are God, and you are the Lord of all the earth, and you own the cattle on a thousand Hills, which is a wonderful way of saying there are no limitations for all is Yours. And most importantly, we are Yours. We are Your children, and because you are our Father and our Shepherd, we shall not be in want, because you make us to lie down in green pastures.

You lead us besides still waters. You're rod and your staff, they comfort us. Lord build our faith, build our courage, build our heart of devotion and obedience. That when the day of testing comes, we stand our ground. And we say with confidence and faith, I will serve no other master. For we ask this in the Name that is above all names, the Name of Jesus Christ our Savior, amen.