

**Daniel 3:14–30 (ESV)**

**14** 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? **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?” **16** Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. **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. **18** 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.” **19** 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. **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. **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. **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 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.” **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, 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. **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: 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.” 30 Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.**

OK, last week we had the **scene set** for the **next way** that God was going to **show off**. This week we will see how he **orchestrated everything** for **His glory**.

First in verse 14 the king asks Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego if the claims against them are true. Will they truly not worship the king's gods by worshipping at the king's statue?

We don't know if they answered or if they had no chance to say anything. We do know that the next thing the king did was offer them a second chance to bow to the idol.

Look at this closely. Look how **caring** this king was **being** to these young men. Isn't that how it would have **seemed**? After all, the king doesn't **want** these young men to die. They don't have to. He is only asking **one thing**. Aren't these young men being totally **unreasonable**?

He was fully for these young men to continue living. That is what the king **wanted**. **AS LONG AS** they would bow to his gods. We can picture the king saying, "please don't make me do this".

We are likely to see more and more of this. Supervisors and executives don't want to fire Christians. After all, they are good employees. And **all they are asking** is that these Christians sign a document saying that what is bad is good and what is good is bad. These employers want to keep Christians employed. These managers are caring people. **AS LONG AS** the Christians bow to their gods.

It is not unusual for non followers of Christ to **like** followers of Christ. What is not usual is for the world to accept you not bowing to the gods that they must bow to.

Tolerance is one of the most popular alters in our world. But there are many.

We can expect that the hardest voices to resist are going to be the ones that **care most** about our **welfare**, while **demanding** that we compromise our worship to our God. King Nebuchadnezzar didn't **want** to inflict this penalty. He was a good king after all. But he would do it if he had to. That seems like the dynamic that we see in the text.

And just so we don't brush this off as being the kind of tests that only happen to other people in other times, this is a quote from one of the commentators. He said, **The idols that we are asked to worship.... "are the various pleasures, the desires, and the attitudes that society tells me I need to have if I am to be fulfilled and lead a worthwhile life. They promise to bless me if I will bow down to them, but to curse me and ruin my life if I fail to meet their demands."**

*Iain M. Duguid, Daniel, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Iain M. Duguid, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 53.*

The world is **always**, in **various ways**, telling us **what we are made for** and how we **should worship**. We can be certain that the world seldom gets it right. And that is not by accident.

Now, this is what Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied.

“I guess just one time would be alright. After all, I don’t really mean it in my heart. And God knows that. It is just my body. It isn’t my spirit. And after all, doesn’t scripture say that gods are really nothing?”

No, we know that is **NOT** what they said. Some commentators suggest that the Hebrew Children responded quickly because time would have allowed the temptation to foster. That could be. When we **know** what the **right thing is to do**, the quicker we commit to it, usually the better.

This is what they really said:

**“O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. 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. 18 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.”**

You and I know a lot of doctrine. And that is very good. It is valuable. It is necessary. But it is far better to have a little doctrine and live by it, than to have a lot of doctrine that we ignore in our day to day decisions.

The Hebrew children would have recited the Shema from an early age. It begins **“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deut 6:4–5)**

These young men not only **believed** it. They were committed to **living it**.

I think this is, in essence, what verses 16 is saying.

“King, given that we serve the one true God who demands that we **worship only Him**, we don’t really even need to answer you when **you demand** what we owe **only to our God**. Essentially, you do not even have the authority to ask the question.

I’ll just bet the king loved hearing that....

These guys were gutsy and bold.

Young people. Do you want a roll model? Do you want a good example to follow. Do you want to live like someone who made a difference?

You need look no further. These guys made an amazing stand here.

**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.**

Scholars argue about what the “this” is in “if this be so”. I think it is referring to the furnace. I think they are saying, if you do what you say and God actually **allows you** to throw us into the furnace, which is not the certainty you think it to be King, if you do throw us in the furnace,

**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.**

I think this is displaying their good theology.

First, King, you **might not be able** to throw us into the furnace.

Second, **if you do**, God IS able to deliver us from the furnace.

Third, **no matter what**, God **WILL** deliver us out of your hand by protecting us **from** the furnace or by **taking our lives**.

**18 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.”**

I think he is saying, even if God does allow you to throw us into the furnace and even if He does not protect us, if God does not deliver us from the furnace, we are still not going to worship your gods.

I have always loved this passage. We all know of passages where God’s people were given **divine insight** into what **was to pass**. Some **healings** were like that. Sometimes Paul seemed **to know** what **was going to happen**. So they confidently asked God to do something fully expecting they would get what they asked for. But there are other examples in scriptures as well. Like the prayer meeting that was held for Peter. Clearly these people did not believe that God was going to let Peter out of jail. But out he came, even though the prayers were probably not specific or expressed with great faith.

My experience is much more like that. Yours might be too. We pray for what we think God wants, but we are fully aware that we might not be asking for the right thing. So we trust the result to God’s hands.

That is how the Hebrew team approached this situation.

First, they knew **what they must do**. They must **obey God** and in this setting it was very clear to them that they had to **defy the king**. Sometimes we don’t know what we should do. Sometimes things are not this clear. But in this case it **was clear**.

Second, they knew what God **was capable of**. They knew **who God is**. They had a very good picture of this God they worshipped. They knew that, while God keeping them alive in the fiery furnace was **physically impossible**, it was not **spiritually impossible**. God can violate the rules of nature that He originally put into place. Now remember, these guys never had the privilege of reading the book of Daniel. God had never rescued anyone from fire previously. So while they had no precedent, they had a **proper view of God**. They had **big God** theology.

Third, look how they approached God. They did not **presume** on God. They did not put Him to an unnecessary test. They did not say, our God must rescue us from the fire. If God is good, if God really loves me, He must show Himself good by doing this specific thing. Nope. None of that. They came before the one true God **submissive** to His Sovereign will. They knew that God will do **what He wants** to do, **when** He wants to do it, **with whom** He wants to do it. So they do not know how it will pan out for them.

If you want to find yourself in a crisis of faith, tell God what He needs to do **if He is good**. We do well to avoid that situation. God IS good. He does not need a man-created test in order to **prove** Himself good. He has already sent Christ to save us. We know **all we need to know** about God's goodness for us to **place our faith** in Him.

And fourth, they were willing to do the right thing whether it received an immediate reward or not.

They had already made the big decision about discipleship. This is the decision Jesus told people to make ahead of time so they are ready for anything.

Luke 14:25-33 says **Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, 26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. 27 Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. 28 For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? 29 Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, 30 saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' 31 Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? 32 And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. 33 So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.**

Jesus was preparing His followers for the fiery furnaces that come in the Christian life. He did not do his recruiting by telling people **how much better** He would make the **here and now** lives of His followers. Now, it is incredibly true that the blessings of the Christian life are plentiful. And the joy we experience cannot be obtained in any other way.

But think about this. What would Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego have done if they were following God for the reason that **God makes their life better**? They would have had a **dilemma**, a **crisis**. They would have to rethink **everything**.

And they were not in a real good situation to do that when the king is stoking up his heater.

You and I were already called by Jesus to think about this issue ahead of time. So when a situation like this comes, it does not flip us out. We don't need to think about it **then** because we have **already decided** the value of Jesus ahead of time. That was the appeal that Jesus made to the crowd following Him. Is that your commitment to Christ this morning? And yes, we do not need to pretend **we know** we will **pass any test** with flying colors. But we can know that we have decided that we are willing to be made willing to die for Christ if that is what must happen. We do not need to pretend we know we will pass the test. But we can be committed to Christ with the understanding that we would **want to want to** die of Him. It will be God who will need to supply us with **the grace needed** for that test. He is just asking us to make up our minds ahead of time. It is very inconvenient to make up our minds at the last moment. The Hebrew children had obviously made up their minds long before they were placed in this situation. They had counted the cost of discipleship. So the Hebrew children tell the King- No. We will not bow. And if you can kill us, so be it.

**19 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.**

So the king was being magnanimous to the Hebrews. But the response they gave him struck right at the king's pride. Not only were they not going to be grateful for the king's kind gesture, they were going to **insult him** by telling him that the King has no power over them. They don't even need to answer his question.

If you want to ignite fury in a person who loves power, act like they are powerless. If you were teaching someone how to deal tactfully with people in power, you would not take them to this passage.

No these boys would have been comfortable in Jesus's school when Jesus said:  
**28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell** They passed that test.

So now we have another example not to follow. Look what a great decision this fury of the king inspired. Never ever do this at home. Decisions made in haste and in anger usually lead to more loss and regret than anything else. Anger is sometimes a **proper motivator** but it is always a **poor counsellor**.

**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. 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.**

So the king had some of his strongest soldiers, evidently guys that would be very useful in winning wars. He had them handle the Hebrews.

It is almost like the King is saying, you **think I don't have power**. I'll show you power. He chose his strongest men and the hottest flame to display **how much power** he had.

I am not sure what the significance of binding them in all their clothes. It is almost as if the King was making the point that he wanted nothing of them to be left after he exhibited his wrath on these men. He wanted nothing to remind anyone they ever existed.

I have always wondered how this furnace was built. I figure it would need to be below ground level. They were **thrown in** and they **fell** into the furnace, implying it was down hill. I am thinking it must have been visible from above and to the side. But the guards must have had to get close enough to the edge for the rising heat to destroy them. It looks like the guards, in the process of throwing them in were killed, and that left the Hebrews to **fall** the rest of the way.

So now there are **three less strategic military men** to help with Babylon's wars. I can almost picture the king's wife asking him later, "do you really think that was necessary?" But maybe that is something only our wives would do. There was probably room in the furnace for a wife or two as well.

**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 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."**

So the king was watching seated down. But this made him jump out of his chair. He clarified the facts with his counselors, just to make sure he got it right.

Sure enough. Three men were sent to their certain death. And here they are walking around like they are on Sunday stroll. The only thing that burnt were the ropes. So they are seeing the impossible. That would have been enough. But God was not content with that accomplishment. He wanted to reveal Himself even a little more.

Nothing that the **King did** would ever overcome the **fellowship** that God has with these men. Not only is the one true God powerful. He is relational. And when you mess with **His people**, you mess **with Him**.

Most scholars believe that Christ showed up here. There is nothing conclusive in the text, but there were other places in the Old Testament where God showed up in human appearance.

Whether it was Christ or an Angel, there is tremendous encouragement for us. **We are never in the trial alone.**

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Are you facing something that is **terribly difficult**. Are you tempted to **freak out** or **give way to fear**? You can know that not only is **God aware** of your plight, He is also applying all the resources you need so you can **make it through the trial**. If what was needed was for Him to **show up**, He would. Usually He sends his people in our trials. (Sometimes he sends his people to cause our trials. It is just like our God to **minister to us** even in those situations that seem designed to **destroy us**. Maybe our God will deliver us **from** the circumstance. Maybe He will deliver us **through** the trial. That is for Him to decide. But we can trust that **He is with us** in the trial.

**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, 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.**

Remember how Nebuchadnezzar started this thing. He was committed to **making a lesson** out of these men. He was going to show to everyone that **you don’t mess with the king and his gods**. Look how it turned out.

God made a lesson out of King Nebuchadnezzar. And the lesson is **don’t mess with the one true God** and His servants.

This is the second encounter that the king had with the Most High God. But we can’t be too hard on him. How many times does it take **for us** to get the point? He now calls the Hebrew children servants of not just **God**, but the **most high God**. He probably still had not given up on the other gods. But he knew one thing for sure. This Hebrew God could do what none of the others could. The King understood **power** and this God **had power**.

It is interesting too that the original intent of this statue was to bring everyone together to solidify the **worship of the king and His gods**. But all of these officials are now going to return home with a message about the **one true God**. Again God chooses very strange evangelists.

**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: 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.” 30 Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.**

You’ve really got to hand it to the king. He was very perceptive. He got every piece of this right. First, He knew that it was the **God of the Hebrews** who did this. The Hebrew team had trusted in their God to the place they were willing to die rather worship another God.

Now think of the implications. Didn’t the situation **look dismal** for the Hebrew team? Would it not have been easy to question the goodness or the wisdom of the power of God right up to the time the young men were thrown into the furnace? But look at the outcome. The whole horrendous situation was orchestrated by God to do amazingly good things for His people. What looked like disaster was again opportunity.

The King now made a decree that great violence will happen to anyone who mocks the God of Israel. The King understood power. He believed proof when he came across it. And the God of the Judeans is powerful.

Now look at what God used this for, this potentially **horrible awful misuse of power** by a heathen king.

Now, Daniel is the first in command in Babylon, under the king, and the rest of the Hebrew team are promoted to even higher positions than they had previously. And not only that, now the Judeans have a religion with a favored status. How often has **that happened** in the history of the world?

The King would now protect the Judeans from religious persecution.

This is a wonderful point to close on.

Our God never forgets those that He calls His children. He is always working for their good. Sometimes the backdrop that He does it against looks dismal. But God is never limited in His efforts to bless His children.

You and I don’t often see miracles. God certainly still does them. But we should not expect them regularly. Yet we know that **God is always the same**. His intent for His children is the same as it was for Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. And if a miracle is what is needed, it is a miracle that we will get.

God is always working for the good of His children.

Will we trust Him this week?