

We Will Not Serve Your Gods

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[0 : 00] You can have a seat and please take out your Bible and turn to the book of Daniel. Thank you. Daniel chapter 3. Thank you, Kenzie, for coming to help me with the welcome and the call to worship. A little distracting to have her with me, but I was really glad she was with me.

I wasn't sure I would remember that text. Okay, Daniel chapter 3. And Kara, please come and give us. Kara is going to read the first 12 verses because these are long verses. Have you noticed that in Daniel? Long verses, okay? So Kara is going to read for us Daniel chapter 3, verses 1 through 12. King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold whose height was 60 cubits and its breadth 6 cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent together the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. 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 the herald proclaimed aloud, You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King

Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning, fiery furnace. Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, all the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Therefore, at that time, certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews. They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, O king, live forever. You, O king, have made a decree that every man who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music shall fall down and worship the golden image. And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning, fiery furnace.

There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, pay no attention to you. They do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up. Thank you, Kara. Do you like surprises?

[3 : 07] Some people like surprises and some people do not like surprises. What about like a surprise that is an unexpected gift? Yes, yes, unexpected gifts. What about an unscheduled date? Yes, people like that.

Special kindnesses. Like maybe your sibling receives something and chooses to share with you. That is an unexpected kindness, kind of a surprise. We like that. What about a spur-of-the-moment vacation?

You just get in the car and you just go somewhere. These are great surprises, right, Eli? Great surprises. King Nebuchadnezzar, in our text, gets the surprise of his life. And I am really excited to tell you about it.

But we have some work that we need to do to open up this text and make sure that we get to that first, okay? Last week, we learned about King Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its interpretation. And in his dream, he saw an image. And in our text today, we see this word image a whole bunch of times.

[4 : 18] And do you know what occurred to me yesterday morning when I was preparing for today? It occurred to me that some of us might not know what the Bible means when it uses the word image.

So maybe if you're under the age of, let's say, 12, let me ask you this question. If you're under the age of 12, this question is for you. When you hear the word image, what comes to mind? Evan? A picture. That is what I was afraid of. And that is the correct answer. And that is exactly what I was afraid of. That last week, I should have explained a little better what an image is. So we're going to do that today, okay? I brought a little visual. I don't do this very often because I'm not sure that they're terribly helpful for preaching. But we're a family and you'll bear with me, okay? This, this is an image. Right? This is an image. It is a statue.

[5 : 21] So when the Bible uses this word image, it's not talking about a picture or a portrait or something on your phone that you swipe through. It is not talking about that.

It's talking about a statue. An idol. This is not an idol. It just happens to be an ugly statue. Okay? Yeah. Yeah. With a pot in its hand. Ridiculous. Okay? That, that is an image. So when you see that word image in the Bible, you should think not picture or photo or portrait.

You need to think a statue. Something that's real that you could, you could touch and you could look at and you could put your, it's a statue. Okay?

Good? Good? Now, when, when Nebuchadnezzar, I have to keep moving or we are never getting through this text. When, when, when Nebuchadnezzar had his dream last, last week, do you remember what the statue was made of?

[6 : 32] There was some gold and there was some, some silver. There was some clay. There was some iron. It was made of all, Sophie? Bronze. Bronze.

Bronze. There were all sorts of different metals that were part of this statue that he saw, this image that he saw in his dream. And Daniel told King Nebuchadnezzar last week, you are the head of gold.

But all of those other metals represented other kingdoms that were going to come after his. Did you notice what Nebuchadnezzar used to make his image, his statue this week?

Gold. Gold. Gold. What else? Just gold. Just gold. Gold. Not just the head. The whole thing is made out of gold.

What is King Nebuchadnezzar saying? I'm not willing to be just the head of gold. My kingdom is not going to be destroyed and toppled.

[7 : 43] There's not coming other kingdoms after mine. My kingdom is it. Gold. The whole statue is gold. And it shouldn't surprise us that Nebuchadnezzar is kind of a go-big or go-home kind of person.

His statue, his image that he makes is 90 feet tall. Do you know how big a school bus is? No. Not 90 feet.

But if you had two and a half school buses, that would be 90 feet. So if you took a school bus and you stood it up like this, and then another school bus and you stood it up on top of that, and then half of another school bus on top of that, that would be about 90 feet.

This is a very tall gold statue. Nebuchadnezzar is all in on his rebellion against what God says will happen in the future.

Nebuchadnezzar's statue declares, I am in control. I can define the future. I can define my destiny. No God is going to tell me that I am just the head.

[8 : 56] It's all about me. Nebuchadnezzar's statue, you might think, is just about some show and tell, right?

Like maybe we gather all of these people around so that they can look at this amazing statue that I have built. But this is not show and tell for Nebuchadnezzar. The text helps us, if we look for the words, the text helps us to understand this is a religious ceremony.

This is a worship gathering. And verses 4 and 5 give us the order of service. Verse 4, second half of the verse.

You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, that when you hear the sound of the horn, the pipe, the lyre, the trigon, the harp, the bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship, worship the golden image, the golden statue that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.

No exceptions. No exemptions. No exclusions. No excuses. Everyone needs to be there. Everyone is commanded.

[10 : 14] You hear the music. You bow down and worship or die. And so the music plays.

And literally, everyone bows down. But not literally everyone bowed down. There are three people, Eli.

You're right. Three people who do not bow down. Daniel's friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, they refuse to bow down and worship the king's idol.

Why? Why would they refuse to do this? It is because God's law forbids it. Exodus chapter 20 and verse number 4.

You shall not make for yourself a carved image. What's it talking about? Not a photo. A statue.
[11 : 16] Don't make an idol. You shall not make for yourself a carved image of any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth.

You shall not bow down to them. God's law forbids it. That is why they don't bow down.

Now, the Chaldeans, Nebuchadnezzar's former all-star team of wise men, bring this matter to the king's attention.

This is verse number 8. Therefore, at that time, certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews.

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

[12 : 16] 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.

The word that is used here for accused is interesting, I think, because it means like chewed on. It's like how you would chomp up on some peanut M&Ms.;

They are grinding, like the way maybe adults you would chew a piece of steak. Their anger, their jealousy, their malice, their evil intent towards these three men is very clear.

They are chomping at them. These people are different from us. They don't respect the things that we respect.

They don't do the things that we do. They don't love the things that we love. They don't fit in here. They don't belong here. And they did not bow and worship your idol.

[13 : 26] Friends, if you resolve to faithfully obey the Lord Jesus Christ, do not expect to receive the world's love.

The Apostle John wrote, Do not be surprised if the world hates you.

So Nebuchadnezzar hears this troubling accusation against his three recently promoted wise men, and he demonstrates the emotional stability that we have come to expect from him.

This is in verse 13. Then Nebuchadnezzar, in furious rage, commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought.

So they brought these men before the king. 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, the golden what?

[14 : 43] Statue that I have set up. 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.

Did you notice this word's burning, fiery furnace? Every time in this text, it's burning, fiery furnace. It reminds me of the joke about the Department of Redundancy Department. It's already burning.

It's already fire. It's already a furnace. But we get these same three words over and over. We are intended to realize that the threat on their lives is very, very real.

So, choosing to obey God and to disobey King Nebuchadnezzar will cost you.

[15 : 50] But this is not a test, like a fire drill in school, or like when we hear the sirens, the tornado sirens on the first Wednesday of the month.

I think it's at 1 p.m. When we hear those sirens, this is not a drill. This isn't some kind of a test. They can see the fiery furnace burning.

It's right there. The threat on their lives is very real. They get it. Either you bow or you will die.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego face a life or death decision.

But I want you to also notice Nebuchadnezzar's very last statement in verse 15 because I think it helps us to get some perspective on this story.

This is what Nebuchadnezzar says right at the end of verse 15. And who is the God who will deliver you out of my hands?

[16:57] If there is a God, how can I bear not to be him? Where is this God who can deliver you out of my hands?

Nebuchadnezzar is a violent, narcissistic, emotionally unstable king who dares to defy the living God.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego offer no defense to the Chaldean accusation. There is no defense. They're clearly guilty. Everyone knows it. There is no defense.

And the king's plea deal does not tempt them for one moment to disobey or dishonor God. There is no dialogue recorded in the text, no discussion, no debate.

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

[18:08] If this be so. In other words, when you throw us into the fire.

If this be so. When you throw us into the fire. 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. But if not. 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. If this be so. When you throw us into that fire.

[19:04] O king. You need to know these things. We know that our God is able to deliver us. Their faith is in God. Second.

We believe that our God. Will deliver us. They have firm conviction about God's purposes. Third.

Even if God does not deliver us. We will not sin. In order to escape suffering. And finally.

We will die. Before we disobey God. This is courageous obedience. Like Paul, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego say.

To live is Christ. Right? And to die is gain. Either way. We're not going to bow.

[20:06] King Nebuchadnezzar. The rational. Response. Verse 19.

Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury. He is so irrational. He is beside himself. That's the word here. He is out of his mind.

Angry. Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury. And the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

I take this to mean he gave them angry eyes. Can you do angry eyes, kids? Angry eyes. Elam. That looks a little too happy for angry eyes. Like Isaac.

Like that. Yes. Like that. He is so angry that they would dare stand up to him. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated.

[21:15] Why? Why? It is already a burning, fiery furnace. He is irrational in his hatred and his anger and his maliciousness towards them.

But I also have to wonder just a little bit if he's beginning to think maybe a normally heated, burning, fiery furnace, maybe their God can save them out of that.

So we're going to crank this thing up and make sure that their God is not able to deliver them out of my hands.

Verse 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.

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.

[22:22] 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.

And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning, fiery furnace.

And this ought to end chapter 3. Like really, it should end it, right? You've been thrown into a furnace overheated.

The people who threw you into the furnace are not wimps. They're warriors. And they died getting close enough to throw you into the fire. There is no way you are surviving this.

You cannot get out of this. 23 should be the end of the story. But it's not, is it? I know. It should be, though.

[23 : 22] But we don't want it to be. This brings us to Nebuchadnezzar's surprise. I want you to notice how the Holy Spirit sets this up for us, because I think it's so wonderful.

It is really hard to type Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. I'm sure I typed it 25 or more times this week. I suspect it's even more frustrating to have to write it by hand with a little, to write their names each by hand with a little quill on a piece of parchment.

But here's how the Holy Spirit sets this up. Three names, four verses, four times. Three names, four times in five verses.

All three names, four times in five verses. Why is the Holy Spirit doing this? Why keep writing their names over and over and over?

Here's why. Verse 24. Then Nebuchadnezzar was astonished. This is his surprise. And he rose up in haste.

[24 : 34] And 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.

And 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.

Why is Nebuchadnezzar so surprised? Because he can count to three. This is why he is surprised. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

He can count to three. He knows that he threw three men into the burning, fiery furnace. And yet as he looks in this furnace, he sees four men, unbound, walking around in the furnace.

And then Daniel states what is miraculously obvious. They are unhurt. Who is this fourth man?

[25 : 41] Who is this fourth man? Let's start with what the king says. The king says that this is a son of the gods. He recognizes that this person, this fourth person, is a divine being, a supernatural being, a divine person, a deity of some sort.

I think we should hesitate to be too dogmatic where the scripture is not clear. But it seems as though this is a theophany. I'm going to tell you what it is.

I knew you were going to ask. I'm going to tell you what a theophany is. A theophany is a pre-incarnate appearance of the second person of the Godhead.

In other words, if I can say that one step even more plainly, this is the son of God on earth before he officially came to earth as a baby.

You can think about it kind of like a director who makes a cameo appearance in his film. I wonder if the identity of the fourth man remains ambiguous because surprising Nebuchadnezzar is really not the primary purpose for his appearance.

[27 : 04] His primary purpose. The primary purpose for his presence is fulfilling God's promise to his people.

We heard this promise during our call to worship. This is Isaiah 43. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. And through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you.

When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned and the flame shall not consume you. If the first half of verse 26 is surprising, the second half is astonishing.

Look at verse 26. This is surprising, isn't it? Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace and he declared, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out and come here.

That is surprising that you can stand in front of your burning fiery furnace and call to the three men who are walking about with a fourth man and ask them to come out. But here is what is astonishing.

[28 : 14] End of verse 26. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. And the satraps and the prefects, the governors and the king's counselors, they gathered together.

This must have been just a crazy thing. And they 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.

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.

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 than the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

[29 : 26] And so it turns out that Nebuchadnezzar was wrong. There is a god who can deliver his people out of the king's hand.

Nebuchadnezzar is impressed, but he is unconverted. God has his attention, but God does not yet have his heart.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's faith is in God. They have firm conviction about God's purposes. They are content in God's will, and they model courageous obedience.

They are faithful in a foreign land. And God's presence meets those who persevere in faithful obedience.

Followers of Jesus. Your citizenship is in heaven. And so like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, God calls you to be faithful right here in a foreign land.

[30 : 39] How does Daniel 3 encourage us to be faithful to Jesus? Let's revisit the trio's response to the king.

This is verse number 17. They said this, Our God is able to deliver us. Our God is able to deliver us. Faithfulness to God is not built on pleasant platitudes.

Faithfulness to God is not built on emotional assertions. It is not the fruit of sweet sentiments. None of that will hold up to the fire.

Faithfulness flourishes in the Christian's confidence that God is in control of every circumstance. When you have confidence in God's sovereignty, then you can say with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, our God is able to deliver us and you will rest in God doing whatever maximizes His glory.

Even if you don't understand it. The second thing they say, Our God will deliver us. Paul writes in Romans chapter 8, If God is for us, who can be against us?

[32 : 09] I wonder, steadfast, if we really believe that. Do you believe that God is for you? When you ask Him for help, do you believe that He will help you?

When you ask Him for wisdom, do you trust His promise to provide the wisdom that you need? When you ask for normal things like food and warmer weather and safety for your children and comfort for those who are grieving, do you believe that He is a good Father who gives good gifts to His children?

Do you believe that God is for you? See, when you have this kind of conviction about God's purposes, then you will pray trusting that God will answer.

Our God will deliver us. What about when God doesn't seem to answer your prayers?

What if your circumstances don't change? What if the injustice goes unpunished? What if there is no relief from the pain?

[33 : 32] What if those who falsely accuse get away with it? What if your life gets worse and not better? Well, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego testify to us, God will deliver us, but if not.

But if not, like them, we must refuse to sin in order to avoid suffering.

We should not rationalize disobedience for the sake of some greater good. We should not be the kind of people discussing whether two wrongs will somehow make a right.

That's what I mean when I say we're not going to sin in order to avoid suffering. Our God will deliver us, but if not, when obedience is costly, are you willing to pay the price then?

Because Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, these heroes of the faith, point us straight to Jesus. Jesus is in the garden and He is under immense pressure.

[35 : 02] He knows the torture that awaits Him. He knows the death that awaits Him. But He also knows that in those dark hours while He is on the cross, He will bear the awful punishment of God's wrath against our sin.

Jesus will not rebel against God's plan. Jesus will not sin in order to escape suffering. When obedience is costly, Jesus willingly pays the price.

Not my will, but yours be done. Our God will deliver us, but if not, then we will rest content in His will.

We'll claim His will as our own. Not my will, but yours be done. I wonder if Jesus is your Savior, or like Nebuchadnezzar, does God have your attention, but not yet your heart?

Children, as you hear the gospel again, I ask you, have you been born again? Have you been born again?

[36 : 26] What if God's will for you is ongoing adversity? What if God's will for you is unrelenting pain? What if God's will is unprovoked gossip and slander?

What if God's will is unfounded accusations? What if obedience costs you your career, your family, your friends? What if God's will leads you ultimately to death?

Then by His sufficient grace, choose to obey Jesus. Why? Because God's presence meets those who persevere and faithful obedience.

Jesus promises us in Hebrews chapter 13, I will never leave you nor forsake you. Oh, for a heart, oh, for a heart that knows the quiet contentment of satisfaction with God's presence, regardless of present circumstances.

Let's pray about that together. Good Father, we are so grateful to have had this opportunity to be in your word together.

[37 : 55] Thank you for the things that you have taught us and helped us to understand better. and thank you for the ways that you are by the power of your Holy Spirit and the preaching of your word calling our attention to places where we have not been faithful in a foreign land.

Would you, by the power of your Holy Spirit, convict and grant us repentance as we spend a few moments preparing to celebrate communion together.

Help us as we examine our hearts. Give us faith to believe your promises. Father, we are so humbly grateful to put our attention on our Savior, Jesus, and to confess that he was perfectly faithful to you, perfectly submissive to your will, and that he perfectly obeyed you in so many ways that we have not.

We confess that we come before you not on the basis of the good things that we have done, but on the basis of the righteousness, the beauty, the perfection, the holiness of our Savior, Jesus.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for interceding for us. Thank you for saving to the uttermost. Thank you, Holy Spirit, for working in our hearts.

[39 : 38] Please plant this word deep down inside of us and help us as we continue to respond. Please be with us as we continue to worship. It is in Jesus' name that we pray.

Amen. Amen.