



Take a look at the screens at this picture. When a warrior went to battle in medieval times, the first thing he did was to kneel to pray and then bend his sword over his knee to see if it would break. He needed to know that it would hold up in the heat of battle. That makes sense because it's been said, (just like with the sword), "A faith that can't be tested, can't be trusted."

If that was ever true...that was certainly true of three men, who didn't use swords, but nonetheless had faith that was tested and proved to be unbreakable. They're names: Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. You know them better as: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (their Babylonian names). You would also, most likely, know them if I showed you this depiction:



The fiery furnace, with the fourth man with them. Therefore, we come to the question of the morning: How could these three young men have the kind of "metal" to be willing to go to their own deaths, so as not to go against the Word of God? The title of today's message: "To Whom Will You Bow?"

Church family, we live in a world today where many Christians have suspect and fickle loyalties. They're loyal to the cause of Christ until it costs them something. I read a sign the other day that said this:

“Don't say you'll go to jail over your faith, when you won't even go to church for it.”

So true. Unfortunately, the cold, hard truth is: everyone has a good excuse for why they bow to pressure, to not stand for God's truths. Oh, people SAY they have all of these strong convictions; and yet, often it's just a lot of talk, blather when it comes to the front lines of battle. I can say it this way for instance. See the screens:

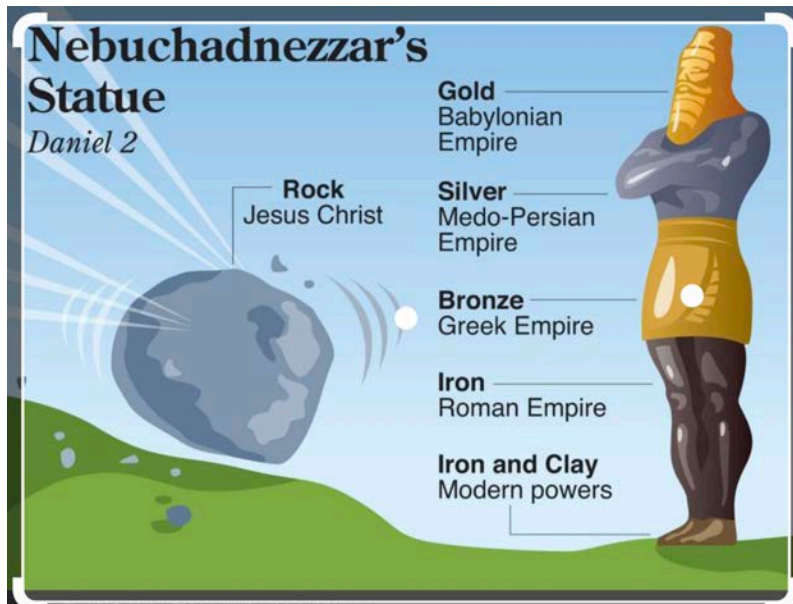


you don't really know how strong that rubber band is until it's put under extreme pressure and stretched. This morning, we're going to watch three young men be stretched to the max...

Daniel 3:1-6

¹ King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits^[a] and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. ² Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather 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. 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. ⁴ And the herald proclaimed aloud, "You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, ⁵ 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 has set up. ⁶ And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace."

Now, if you've been with us, you know King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon has had a terrifying dream that he couldn't figure out. God gave Daniel, a teenager, (20-something at best), a Hebrew slave from Israel, the ability to tell the dream and interpret it. He revealed to the King a statue:



This statue represented the Gentile kingdoms up and to the time of Christ's return to this earth, depicted by a stone that would topple the statue. Remember how we've depicted that:



Well, scholars tell us around 20 years likely have passed since the time of the King's dream to the point where he has now ordered a statue be built that would be a representation of him. And for Nebuchadnezzar, he wasn't content with merely a head of gold, he wanted the entire statue to be of gold (some scholars say it was just overlaid with gold, not solid gold). See the depiction:



It was 90' tall by 9' wide. It was MASSIVE!

Church, now this is me...I believe fear had gripped Nebuchadnezzar's heart and mind. He had become paranoid. He believed the interpretation of the dream. He even bowed his face before Daniel, acknowledging that Daniel's God had revealed the truth to him...yes, his kingdom would be destroyed, that wrecked him. He wanted to hold on to his kingdom...so, he was going to try to stop the dream from coming true...he was going to find a way to demand complete loyalty, which would squash all potential rebellions. His actions reminded me of King Herod killing all of the boys under 2 years of age in Bethlehem, because of his paranoia.

Now, here's the thing church...what we just read was quite the spectacle. It was like a religious with all that music. Like an orchestra playing...announcing the moment you were to hit your face on the ground. You know, throughout history, leaders/governments are notorious for requiring "religious like adherence" to their policies, and that's because they're fearful of losing their power. That was Nebuchadnezzar. All of this pomp and circumstance, creating a religious-like-fervor, on behalf of the "worshippers." Will they bow? Let's see...

Daniel 3:7

⁷ 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.

ALL THE PEOPLES... Scholars tell us that would have conservatively have been 300,000 people. Or I would say: "300,000 sheep." And they all hit the ground. That's a pile of non-thinking, intimidated people...baa...baa.... It's typical though. People do whatever they need to so as to not lose anything. We've experienced that in this nation. Let's be blunt, this is why people cheat to make the business deal. It's why people look the other way as they take a bribe. People invariably bow to the system, so as to gain from the system...don't buck the powers that be. Don't bite the hand that feeds you. Keep the checks coming. Do whatever you're told so as not to lose your position, your possessions, your prominence, your power. Sounds like Washington, DC. Sounds like a lot of America, doesn't it!

Yea...300,000 people hit their faces...but three didn't. And that's when the troubles came and the accusations started. For Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, buckle up boys, because they're calling in the Babylonian CIA, the FBI, the DOJ...let the witch hunt begin for Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

Daniel 3:8

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

Now go back with me to when Daniel and his buddies didn't eat the King's food. That act set them against all of the other guys...and you will remember, when Daniel was able to tell the King his dream, this set him against the rest of the "wise men," (the soothsayers, enchanters, sorcerers, **all of those "total fakes"**). Well, this made these Jewish young men hated by the Babylonian hierarchy.

Church, let's be blunt: they were jealous! They: "maliciously accused the Jews." The Hebrew words for that phrase means: "to eat the flesh off of bones." Gross! Eating the flesh off of the bones of dead animals. Yuck! That's what these men wanted to do to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

Well, you may ask: "Where's Daniel?" Quite simply. We don't know. We aren't told. Perhaps he was away on a mission for the King. Perhaps because he was in the King's Court, in the palace, as his #2 guy...maybe he wasn't required to be part of this, since he was already considered such a "trusted advisor." We just don't know, but he's not mentioned in this entire chapter.

Well, we now get to hear from the liars, they've now come before the King...taken to their podium...all the microphones from mainstream media MSNBC, NPR, CNN. They're all there! Here we go:

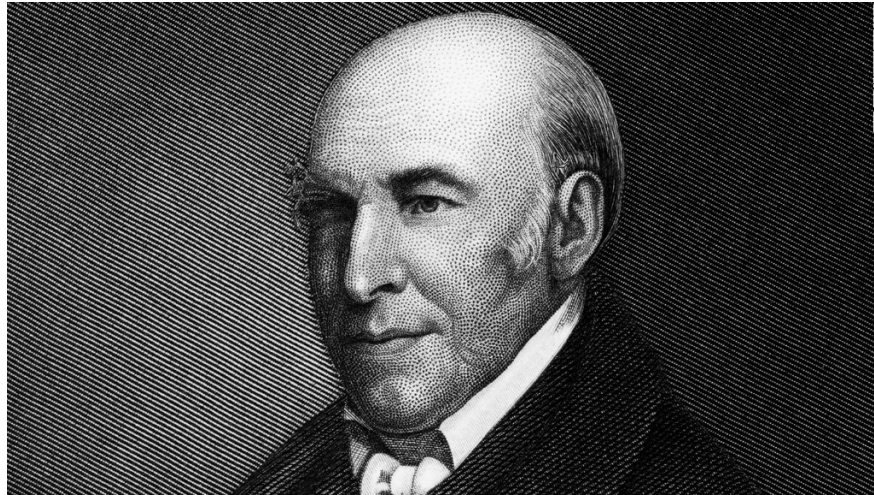
Daniel 3:9-11

⁹They declared^[b] 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. ¹¹And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace. ¹²There 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."

Wow! What a scene!!! They've made some serious allegations. Three accusations really. The first one was a lie: "They pay no attention to the King." That's not true! There's no mention of these three men seeking to be dishonoring to the King or desiring to take him down. They have "Rendered unto Caesar that which is Caesar's." These men, in all regards, were good citizens. But, the next two accusations were true. "They don't serve your gods or worship your image." That's true.

You know, I thought a lot about this. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego could have had all kinds of excuses, like: "You know this statue is not even real, so why worry about it. We'll just kneel down to everybody else, and in private, pray to the only true God." Or they could have said: "Everybody else is doing it. If we're going to "reach" these people with the knowledge of our God, well, we've got to be here to do it. If we're ashes in the furnace, that won't help anybody." It's easy to make excuses, isn't it? And they all sound really good rolling off of our intimidated tongues. Elites want to call us names and intimidate us. "You homophobe, you bigot, you hater!" And we make excuses, and we're good at it. We're all really good attorneys for ourselves! We can justify anything! But these three young men didn't compromise!

I was reading this week about Stephen Girard...



He was one of the wealthiest men in America in the early 1800's. As the story goes, he told one of his workers that he would need to come in the next day and unload a special shipment that was coming in. But the next day happened to be a Sunday. One of the young men nervously approached Mr. Girard and said: "Mr. Girard, I can't work on Sunday. It goes against what I believe. I can't work tomorrow, sir" "Well, sir," said Mr. Girard, "if you can't work tomorrow, do as you wish, pick up your final paycheck as you leave today." "But sir," the young man replied, "I must take care of my mother and she's a widow, so I need my job, but I cannot work on Sundays." "Very well," said Mr. Girard, "go to the cashier's desk and he'll settle with you. Out!"

For three weeks, the young man walked the streets of Philadelphia looking for job. One day, a bank president stopped and asked Mr. Girard to name a suitable person for cashier of a new bank that he was opening. After reflecting for a moment, Mr. Girard named the young man he had fired. "But I thought you said you fired him," said the bank president. "I did," snorted Girard, "because he wouldn't work on Sunday. But I tell you, the man who will lose his job on account of principle is the man with whom you can trust your money." And so, upon Mr. Girard's recommendation, the young man was hired. True story! The lesson: sometimes you've got to be willing to be fired, to watch God work.

You know, you have to ask the question if you're in Nebuchadnezzar's situation, why bother with just three guys, right? It's 300,000 to 3. What's the big deal? Well, when you're full of pride and you're egomaniac...narcissist, you have to have everyone's submission! That's how Elite's work. That's how the DEI ruling class works. You have to say my pronouns!

Egomaniacs are never satisfied with anything less than total submission! Made me think of Gavin Newsom during Covid in California. Pastor John MacArthur bucked him and the Los Angeles County Health Department...see them here...



John MacArthur held church in spite of the Draconian lockdown measures instituted by the egomaniac, Governor, Gavin Newsom. Well, LA County took MacArthur and the church, Grace Community Church to court and threatened to lock up Pastor MacArthur. John MacArthur said, "Bring it on...we are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves and the government doesn't get to tell the church what to do, God does that." Well, Grace Community won! See the headline...



Why L.A. County paid \$400,000 to a church that violated coronavirus rules



Grace Community Church congregants make their way to Sunday service in Sun Valley last September. The church regularly held packed morning services, defying a court order directing them to refrain from holding indoor services due to the COVID-19 pandemic. (Genaro Molina / Los Angeles Times)

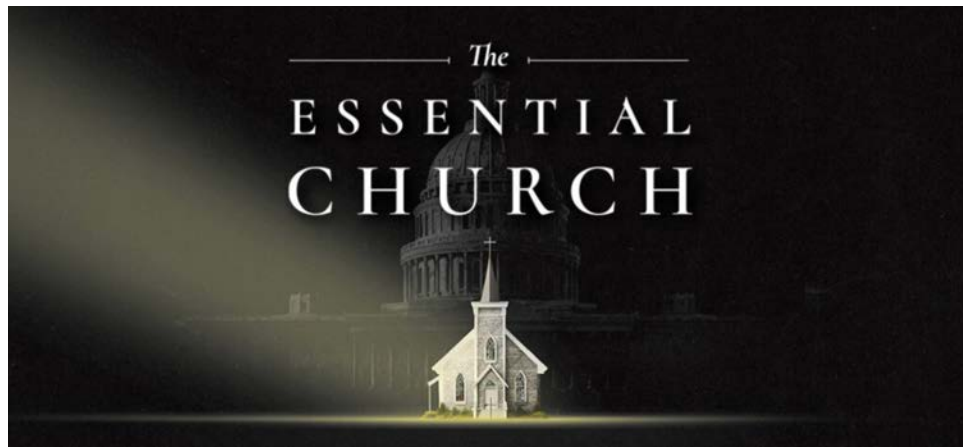
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Not only did they win, LA County had to pay the church \$400,000 for their court fees. The church made a movie about the whole ordeal. It's called:



Essential Church. I highly recommend it to you! It's riveting! It's some pretty tough stuff...people getting arrested...children clinging to their daddies...so, I would say it's PG. You can watch it at: Essentialchurchmovie.com. John MacArthur had backbone!

Well, Nebuchadnezzar loses it!

Daniel 3:13

¹³ Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king.

Guess whose back...this guy...Mr. Anger!



Proud men don't like being told: NO. It's been said: "The mark of a little man is the one who can't hold his temper." Can you hold your temper? Nebuchadnezzar couldn't. He's a raving maniac. He has the three men brought to him, and for all we know, he may kill them on the spot...

Daniel 3:14-15

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.^[a] 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?"

Church, I guess he's forgotten the fact that 20 years earlier, he was on his face telling Daniel that his God was the "God of gods and Lord of Kings." You know fools forget quickly when they're ruled by their own egos and anger.

Let me give you a quick a word about this fiery furnace. This furnace was likely used for smelting ore. In that day, those types of furnaces had large openings at the top. Vessels filled with ore would be lowered down into the furnace and there was a door at the base of the furnace where you could open up and take out the metal. Now, there were slits in the walls to allow airflow and it's also through these openings which the smelters could look and see inside and check the progress of the work. Verse 16. What will they say?

Daniel 3:16-18

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.^[d] 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."

Their minds were made up and they flat out told the King, do what you go to do, but we're not bowing! Can I say this? I really believe Nebuchadnezzar knew they couldn't bow. He was a smart man, and by now, he had heard of their laws. And they're our laws...the moral law they're we're still to follow...the 10 Commandments. And it's the first two...the two that would be violated:



#1 You shall have no other gods before me. #2 You shall not make any idols.

Church, this is the "rubber hitting the road." God said: "Don't!" Nebuchadnezzar said: "Do it." Who wins! For Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, they had been taught all of their lives from the Torah and the Pentateuch and they believed it, owned it and had internalized it, and they weren't backing down. Yes, they had been hauled off from home, their names changed, emasculated, taught the ways of Babylon, but just as with the King's meat, which would have been a violation of God's law to eat it, there were not bowing down to this idol. God comes first!

And church family, here's the thing...they weren't saying that God was definitely going to deliver them from the fiery furnace. No, they just said, "Even if God chooses not to perform a miracle, we're still not bowing down." You see, there courage, like a sword, was being bent over their knees! They weren't going to break, even if it meant death. **Church, true faith doesn't look for loopholes; truth**

faith obeys God, period. It knows that faith rests on God's promises, not rationalizations, not explanations, not justifications. It's our job to obey God and trust Him come what may.

God is faithful and he rewards faith, but He doesn't always step in and perform some sort of miracle because we have faith. You understand, not everyone who prays receives a miracle. Not everyone who prays is healed. Not everyone who prays wins the game, or keeps their job. But, God always gives strength, mercy and the grace to handle every situation and to face any and all consequences.

The Apostle Paul knew this...you remember, he was delivered from his first imprisonment in Rome, but not his second. The day came when he was taken out of the Mamertine Prison in Rome and his head placed on a block, and an axe would flash and Paul would go to glory. He never compromised even when threatened with death, because he knew: "to live is Christ and to die is gain."

Well, Nebuchadnezzar is now livid!

Daniel 3:19-23

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,^[e] 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.

The situation seems hopeless, doesn't it? They're headed to the furnace and from the outside looking in...it seems all is lost! Oh...but wait a minute...this is like a Lazarus moment... He was dead...but, Jesus was on the way...and the same is true here!

Daniel 3:24-26

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.

You know what I thought of...the words of Isaiah:

Isaiah 43:2

² 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.

The only thing that fire burned was the ropes that bound those three men and because of that, Nebuchadnezzar struggled with what he was seeing. He saw four men and the fourth man looked like "a son of the gods." Who was that? Some say it was an angel (and it could have been), but I personally believe, it was Jesus. Listen, Nebuchadnezzar was a pagan. He wouldn't have known the Son of God, if Jesus walked up to him and shook his hand. But, I'm convinced he was looking at a pre-incarnate Christophany, (appearance) of Christ. What Nebuchadnezzar did know is that what he was seeing was the supernatural. Well, the rest of the Elites press in to get a look themselves...

Daniel 3:27-30

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.

I love this depiction of that scene...



Those guys just walking out of that furnace door, nothing burned, nothing singed...and they didn't even smell like smoke. They looked the same as when they had walked in! It was a miracle. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had refused to bow to Nebuchadnezzar's golden image, because they resolutely obeyed the commands of God! And so, God came to them.

I close with this story. This man...



Studdert Kennedy was a chaplain for the British Army during World War I. His role often thrust him into danger on the front lines of battle. One day while traveling through war-ravaged France, he wrote this letter to his young son:

“The first prayer I want my son to learn to say for me is not ‘God, keep daddy safe,’ but ‘God, make daddy brave, and if he has hard things to do, make him strong to do them.’ Life and death don’t matter son, right and wrong do. Daddy dead is daddy still, but daddy dishonored before God is something awful, too bad for words. I suppose you’d like to put in a bit about the safety too old chap, and mother would. Well, put it in, but afterwards, always afterwards, because it does not really matter near so much.” Studdert Kennedy, WWI British Chaplain

It's true! Kennedy was right: “Daddy dead is daddy still, but daddy dishonored before God is something awful, too bad for words.” Church, you and I will probably never face a fiery furnace. But you and I are likely to face more and more trials by fire in this pagan culture. As we move to the end of the age...the furnace of hatred and opposition, hostility and anger toward Christians is going to get hotter and hotter...7 times hotter and the pressure to conform will become even more immense. The world is going to try to force you to compromise...say their pronouns, repeat their mantras, do what they tell you to do... So, I have this advice for you...



As a warrior for Christ, pray and then test that sword on your knee to see that it will stand the pressure and be ready for the battle. To whom will you bow? May it only be to Jesus!
