

Key:

Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Orange – Sermon Notes

## Sermon Title

- If we were to all hop in a big bus and drive about 173 miles East we would be confronted by Hanuman.
- Actually we would be confronted with a 90 foot statue of Hanuman.
  - This is what it looks like. \*show slide\*
  - It's made of bronze and was dedicated in 2024.
  - And it depicts a Hindu god known as Hanuman
  - According a spiritual leader involved with the statue, aside from being a beacon of hope and peace the statue serves as the spiritual epicenter of North America.<sup>1</sup>
  - I bet you didn't know that Sugarland, Texas was the spiritual epicenter of North America.
- According to some Hindus, Hanuman is a protective deity.
  - It's said that he lives somewhere on earth, protecting the weak in their time of need.
- And by showing devotion through chants and other forms of piety it's said that one will have peace, blessings, and protection.
- Our text tonight also features a 90 foot tall statue.
  - By worshipping the statue in our text people could preserve their lives and experience worldly favor.
  - This statue wasn't in Sugarland, it was in Babylon.
- Now there are no downsides to not worshipping the statue of Hanuman in Sugarland.
  - But a refusal to worship the statue in Babylon meant certain death.
- I invite you to open your Bibles to Daniel 3 and we'll encounter this statue that I'm talking about.
- Starting in verse 1:

Daniel 3:1 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup>King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.

- Daniel chapter 3 starts off with some of the same elements as Daniel preached about last week.
- We start with Nebuchadnezzar and an image.
  - We would more commonly call this a statue, not an image.
  - Last week Daniel explained that the golden head of the statue of Daniel 2 represented Nebuchadnezzar's rule.
  - And if you remember from last week, Daniel preached about how the statue in the dream was *obliterated*.
    - Which signified the temporal nature of Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom.
      - It was destroyed by a rock not cut by human hands that became a mountain which dominated the whole world.
      - This of course signifies the reign of King Jesus which will last forever.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.timesnownews.com/world/us/us-news/90-foot-tall-bronze-hanuman-murti-statue-of-union-unveiled-in-texas-article-112708277>

- Nebuchadnezzar was no doubt impressed by Daniel's God-given ability to tell him the dream and interpret it.
  - But I think he might have missed the point.
- Because the statue we're told about here in verse 1 is completely golden.
- Aside from the fact that he's made the very thing that gets obliterated by a rock, he's also deviated from the design of the statue from his dream.
- Instead of being made of mixed materials, it's completely golden.<sup>2</sup>
  - Not just the head the entire statue.
  - Nebuchadnezzar definitely missed it.
- Daniel pointed out - Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom was temporary and it would be superseded by the kingdom of God.
  - It reminds me of this phrase that I heard a teacher say to a poor student one time:
    - "I can explain it to you, but I can't understand it for you."
- Of course it may be that Nebuchadnezzar completely understood the dream.
  - But he doesn't yet realize that the God who would eventually conquer the kingdoms of man will absolutely make it come to pass.
- Nebuchadnezzar might have other plans for his kingdom.
  - Remember he's not a worshipper of Yahweh.
    - He might think that he can circumvent the destruction of his kingdom.
      - And maybe he's trying to use a statue to do it.
        - Maybe he's planning to overcome the dream's interpretation by asserting his dominance through forced worship of this statue.
        - Nebuchadnezzar might think he's tightening his grip on his kingdom.<sup>3 4</sup>
  - Just take a moment and appreciate Nebuchadnezzar's profound pride.
    - He's just received this dream telling him that he is just one of the kings that God will set up.
      - And that one day, his kingdom will pass away.
        - And he says "Not if I have anything to say about it."
- Whatever his reasoning for making this statue, he make it's really big.
  - Based on the proportions of the statue, it probably didn't depict a human.
    - It was ninety feet tall and only nine feet wide.
      - I'm six feet five inches tall.
        - So if I had the proportions of this statue, I would be a little less than eight inches wide.
      - So it's probably not a statue of Nebuchadnezzar himself.

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<sup>2</sup> Paul R. House, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. David G. Firth, vol. 23, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2018), 80: "Taken by Daniel's interpretation that he is the head of gold, Nebuchadnezzar builds a corresponding image of gold. His created image remedies the weaknesses inherent in his dream-image: His is made of a unified substance; his has no feet of clay' (1988:65)."

<sup>3</sup> Joe M. Sprinkle, *Daniel*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, Thomas R. Schreiner, and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 92 : "Worshiping this statue symbolized loyalty to the king, who may have had reason to doubt the loyalty of some of his officials"

<sup>4</sup> Sprinkle, *Daniel*, EVBTC, 94 : "Worshiping this statue was in effect a loyalty oath."

- But it was probably symbolic of Nebuchadnezzar's rule.<sup>5</sup>
- Once it's ready he calls all sorts of government officials to attend the dedication of this image.
- Let's read verse 2

### Daniel 3:2 (ESV)

<sup>2</sup>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.

- As we've been hearing about in this series, Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom is massive.
  - And he's set people over huge sections of his empire.
    - Nebuchadnezzar's got people.
      - And his people have people.
      - And those people have their own people.
- And now we see in verse two he's calling everyone together witness the dedication of this this statue.
- As he's writing this, Daniel seems to have sort of a satirical tone.
  - He lists them over and over again all throughout the chapter.
    - Almost like a "all the king's horses and all the king's men" type phrasing.
- And so we have the Satraps, the prefects, the governors, the counselors, the justices, the magistrates, and all the other junk drawer officials.
  - And they're all gathered together - why?
    - For the dedication of this image.
      - They're standing at the foot of this statue ready for the ceremony to start.
- We still do this kind of thing today.
  - People make statues to commemorate a person or event.
  - Then they cover it with a cloth.
  - They invite important people to attend it's dedication.
  - They pull the cover off and everyone claps.
- The whole ceremony is a celebration of the art, and it's beauty.
- But it's actually more about the thing that the statue depicts.
  - That person, event, or whatever is what people are celebrating the real point.
    - That's the thing worth remembering and enshrining in stone or metal.
- Normally when a statue is dedicated in our time, there is also someone who makes some remarks about the statue that are hoping to guide how people respond to it.
- That happens in Daniel chapter 3 too.
  - Let's read verses 4-5

### Daniel 3:4-5 (ESV)

<sup>4</sup>And the herald proclaimed aloud, "You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages,

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<sup>5</sup> Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 23, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 110 : "The fact that all peoples, nations and languages were to fall down and worship it suggests that Nebuchadnezzar intended to unite his kingdom under one religion. It may even be that the image represented himself. Having been told that he was the head of gold, what more natural than to capitalize on the fact and to make the whole image of gold?"

<sup>5</sup>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.

- So now this large gathering of officials are given a command.
  - This is a royal decree shouted by the king's herald.
    - He tells them "When the music plays you fall down and worship!"
- This command is kinda sprung on them.
- We're not told that they received advance notice that they would be worshipping an idol.
- But they might have suspected that this kind of command would have been given to them.
- The king wants them to confirm their loyalty through ceremonial worship.
- He has made this idol, gathered all those he has power over and commands them to worship it.
- I want to pause here and point out that the people who were gathered didn't receive advance notice that they would be commanded to worship an idol.
  - This is instructive for us.
    - We as Christians need to be ready to act on our convictions.
  - I think we can often find ourselves unprepared to be proper witness to the God we serve.
    - And in anticipation of those situations we should take some steps to prepare ourselves.
      - We need to prepare for pressure.
        - That's our first point tonight.
        - **Prepare for pressure.**
          - This is necessary because we're going to be pressed to act contrary to our beliefs.
          - There will come a time when you will be put in a situation that requires you to make a choice.
    - Peter tells us that in 1 Peter 3:15
      - He says that we need to always be

### 1 Peter 3:15 (ESV)

<sup>15</sup>but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,

- This might be as simple as being able to share your testimony.
  - Or having a well thought out biblical response to a cultural issue.
- We need to be ready to be pressured by the world.
  - Will you stuff your convictions into your pocket and go along?
  - Or will you choose to live out your faith?
    - Walking in a manner worthy of your calling.
      - Righteous living is not only something that you do in private.
- Now will probably not find yourself being asked to bow down to an idol.

- But regardless of the context, we need to prepare for pressure.
- And sometimes the pressure is very intense.
  - Let's read verse 6:

#### Daniel 3:6 (ESV)

<sup>6</sup>And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace.”

- Now we see the teeth behind the decree.
  - Nebuchadnezzar is using violence to get the response that he's looking for.
  - He's not so subtly offering his employees a deal they can't refuse.
    - One scholar puts it this way “The prospect of roasting tends to motivate.”<sup>6</sup>
  - And we find out how motivated all these people are in verse 7.
- It says:

#### Daniel 3:7 (ESV)

<sup>7</sup>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.

- King Nebuchadnezzar gets what he wants and all his officials bow down to him.
  - This is an impressive picture.
    - There aren't hard numbers on how many people there might have been at this gathering.
    - But given the comprehensive nature of the list, we can guess that there were at least hundreds, maybe thousands, of people in attendance.
    - It would be like saying “Everyone on government payroll was in attendance.”<sup>7</sup>
- Evidently there were so many worshipping that the king didn't notice that three of his servants didn't bow down.
  - Three among the mass of people withstood the threat of death and the herd mentality.
- But the king's advisors made sure that he was made aware of three such individuals.
- Let's keep reading:

#### Daniel 3:8–12 (ESV)

<sup>8</sup>Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews.

<sup>9</sup>They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, “O king, live forever!

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<sup>6</sup> Davis, *Message of Daniel*, 53.

<sup>7</sup> Kenneth Gangel, *Daniel*, ed. Max Anders, vol. 18, Holman Old Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 75.

<sup>10</sup>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.

<sup>11</sup>And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace.

<sup>12</sup>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.”

- We finally meet the protagonists of our story!
  - Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.
    - We’ve seen these guys before.
    - These three men were friends of Daniel. Their Hebrew names were Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.
      - I’m going to continue using the names that appear in our story just for clarity.
  - Also, in case you’re wondering - Daniel is not mentioned in this story.
    - We don’t really know why he’s not mentioned or where he might be.
    - It’s possible that he was traveling on kingdom business at this time.
      - Maybe he wasn’t required to attend because he was part of the royal court.
    - Whatever the case, he’s not mentioned in this chapter.<sup>8 9 10</sup>
  - Instead of Daniel - it’s his friends who are the central characters of the story.
    - They’re the ones being accused of not worshipping the king.
  - And their accusers are the Chaldeans.
    - We’ve met these guys before.
      - Daniel talked about them last week.
    - They’re a group of wisemen or astrologers who advised the king.
    - And they don’t like the Jews.<sup>11</sup>
      - Last week you heard how Daniel shot to the top of the ranks of these wise men despite being a fresh trainee.

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<sup>8</sup> House, *Daniel*, 80: “The list does not include the palace advisors, which explains Daniel’s absence (see 2:49; Longman 1999:99).”

<sup>9</sup> Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, vol. 18, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 108: “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego administered the affairs of the province, but Daniel’s responsibilities required his presence at the palace. With the king and other important officials absent, someone was needed to govern in the city. Thus Daniel was unable to leave Babylon and travel to the plain of Dura for this event. His absence may also have been due to other factors, but it is certain that Daniel would never have bowed to the image.”

<sup>10</sup> Sprinkle, *Daniel*, 100: “Where is Daniel? We can only speculate why he does not appear in this story. Perhaps he is away. Daniel sometimes traveled outside of Babylon as far away as Susa (cf. 8:2). Perhaps, as a member of the king’s court, Daniel was not required to attend, while his friends (rulers of the province of Babylon) were required (cf. 2:47–48; 3:2–3). Or perhaps Daniel was ill.”

<sup>11</sup> Miller, *Daniel*, 117 : “Since there appears to have been no reason to point out their nationality, the designation seems to reflect a resentment toward the Jewish people and toward their religious practices that caused them to act so very differently from the rest of the world.”

- I bet that these Chaldeans had it out for Daniel and his friends because they were receiving honor and favor from their king.
  - They were jealous.
- So they slither forward to alert the king that three of his employees did not bow to the statue.
- They start off with a customary “long live the king”.
  - And then they remind the king of his decree.
    - It almost feels like a tattletale child ratting out their sibling.
    - They remind him that in response to music, everyone is supposed to fall down in worship.
- They’re careful to not forget the consequence earned by disobedience.
- And then they identify the lawbreakers and they enumerate their offenses.
- These Chaldeans aren’t just like hyper rule followers.
  - They hate Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.
- The word used for “maliciously accused” in verse 8 carries with it a sense of cannibalism.<sup>12 13</sup>
  - It has a this idea of ripping flesh off a limb.
    - They are offended at these Hebrew rebels.
    - And Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego probably expected that.
      - They probably knew that they would ruffle some feathers by choosing to remain standing while everyone else bowed down.
- And we need expect that when we live in a counter cultural, God-honoring way, we will also probably offend some people.
  - We’ve reached our second point tonight.
    - **Expect to offend.**
      - Note: I didn’t say “attempt to offend.”
        - I didn’t say “aim to offend”.
      - I’m simply saying that we can’t be naive.
    - Pastor Tony has talked about this before.
      - How when you share the gospel, or live in a way that pleases God, you will be the stench of death to some people.
    - Don’t be surprised by this.
      - Sometimes I think we let ourselves get steered by the outrage that we anticipate.
        - That seems to be the method that our culture tries to control people right now.
          - Through public humiliation and intimidation.
          - We’ve got to expect offense.
      - Jesus said that the world hated him first.
        - So we shouldn’t expect different treatment.
    - Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego offended the Chaldeans.
    - But they also offended someone else.

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<sup>12</sup> House, *Daniel*, 82: “The text literally says that ‘they ate pieces of the Jews’, an old Akkadian phrase for bringing an accusation (Goldingay 1989:66).”

<sup>13</sup> Baldwin, *Daniel*, 115: “*Maliciously accused* translates the picturesque expression ‘eat the pieces of flesh torn off from someone’s body’ and so ‘to slander’.”

- They offended the king.
- Let's read what happens next:

Daniel 3:13 (ESV)

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

- Understandably, Nebuchadnezzar is furious.
  - He thought he could trust these guys.
    - He probably feels a little foolish.
- Nebuchadnezzar may have been especially sensitive to insubordination at this time.
  - Some scholars note that a rebellion took place roughly a year before the events of Daniel 3.<sup>14</sup>
    - Nebuchadnezzar might be expecting that this might be the beginning of another uprising.
- After all these three rebels were the same ethnicity.
  - And they have a pretty good motive - King Nebuchadnezzar destroyed their lives and carried them off into captivity.
- So Nebuchadnezzar decides to nip this in the bud.
- He summons Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and begins to question them.
- Let's read verses 14–15

Daniel 3:14–15 (ESV)

<sup>14</sup>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?

<sup>15</sup>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?”

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<sup>14</sup> Sprinkle, *Daniel*, 94: “Historically, Nebuchadnezzar had to put down a political rebellion in December/January 595/4 in which many leading officials, including a certain Babu-aha-iddina, were executed.”

- Nebuchadnezzar being the benevolent king that he is gives these guys a second chance.<sup>15 16</sup>
- He brings them before himself.
  - It's likely that he's sitting on some elevated throne, looking down on these three.
    - He's surrounded by soldiers, the picture of strength and power.
- Have you ever been called into the principle's office?
  - Or maybe called into the boss's office after you made a mistake?
    - Your heart is pounding, you can hear your pulse in your ears.
    - You can feel your cheeks flush and your palms get sweaty.
- This is like that but instead of getting detention or a write up, you might be executed if you say the wrong thing.
- After withstanding the pressure of mob the mentality to bow down, they're now personally and publicly confronted by the most powerful man on earth.<sup>17</sup>
- And he's giving them a second chance to obey.
- He even reiterates the instructions for them just to be certain that they understood what to do.
- But he also adds something at the end.
  - Look at that last part.

### Daniel 3:15 (ESV)

<sup>15</sup>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?"

- It's important to remember that King Nebuchadnezzar is a polytheist.
  - Back in chapter 2 he refers to Yahweh as "God of gods".
    - It's a good start.
      - Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged Yahweh as a powerful God.
        - But still one among many.

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<sup>15</sup> Sprinkle, *Daniel*, 101: "Nebuchadnezzar gave them a second chance to obey, perhaps because he liked them. "Who is the god who can rescue you from my power?" denigrates Yahweh. To Nebuchadnezzar's mind, Yahweh is at best inferior to the great patron god he was asking them to worship."

<sup>16</sup> Miller, *Daniel*, 118: "For some reason Nebuchadnezzar was willing to grant these young men an opportunity to change their minds. Possibly he had grown fond of them, or perhaps he felt that it would be a pity to lose three capable men especially since he had made a large investment of time and money in them. The king offered to have the orchestra play just for them. If Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego would bow down before the image, all would be well; but if not, they would be thrown immediately (lit., "in the moment") into the blazing furnace."

<sup>17</sup> Davis, *Daniel*, 52: "There's a tremendous invisible coercion that comes from being among a whole mob of flattened worshipers."

- And certainly not one that can control him as the supreme ruler of the earth.
- He's pretty confident that nothing could save these men from burning in the fire.
- He was certain of his own power.
- There was another time when an evil ruler felt superior to Yahweh's power.
- Back in Exodus 5:2 Pharaoh asks a similar question.
- He says:

Exodus 5:2 (ESV)

<sup>2</sup>But Pharaoh said, "Who is Yahweh, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know Yahweh, and moreover, I will not let Israel go."

- You remember how that story ended right?
  - Pharaoh bowed the knee to Yahweh.
    - And he ultimately lost his life as he attempted to subvert God's plan.
- These three men know that story.
  - The story of the Exodus is woven deeply throughout their cultural DNA.
- And with that story in mind, they respond to Nebuchadnezzar.
- Let's read verse 16–18

Daniel 3:16–18 (ESV)

<sup>16</sup>Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.

<sup>17</sup>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.

<sup>18</sup>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."

- This is a flat refusal of the king's mercy.
  - They're not going to go back on their choice to now worship the idol.
- They don't give an excuse as to why they didn't bow down.
  - They don't ask for more time to consider whether they will bow down.
  - There's no hemming and hawing about it.
  - There's no equivocation.
  - Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are not going to serve Nebuchadnezzar's gods.
  - And they're not going to worship the image.
  - It's not that they don't want to serve the king.
    - Based on everything we know about them, they're carrying out their duty to the king as they govern their territory.
  - Their concern is related to worship.
- Look at what they say - they're not going to

Daniel 3:18 (ESV)

<sup>18</sup>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."

- This is a first commandment issue.<sup>18</sup>
  - God has commanded in Exodus 20:3:
    - “You shall have no other gods before me.”
- This issue is one that Israel has struggled with for centuries.
  - And Israel’s idolatry is part of why they’re in exile at all.
- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are keenly aware of this.
  - These young men likely heard Jeremiah’s preaching against the worship of idols.
    - In Daniel chapter 6 we even see Daniel reading Jeremiah’s prophecy.
- And then they saw and experienced the destruction of their home as a result of Israel’s disobedience.
- They’re living in the aftermath of Israel’s idolatry.
  - And now Nebuchadnezzar, the king, their boss, is asking them to bow down to an idol.
    - They have to choose who they’re going to obey.
    - Which authority will they recognize?
      - Yahweh the ultimate judge?
      - Or Nebuchadnezzar - the tool of judgement?
  - But what if they just bow down without worshipping?
    - If it’s not genuine, what’s the big deal about bowing down?
    - Couldn’t they just cross their fingers behind their back while they’re bowing?
    - Doesn’t God only care about the heart?
      - Yes, it’s true that God cares about the heart.
    - But bowing down in order to save their lives would indicate something about their hearts.
      - It would indicate that they prioritize self-preservation over obedience to their God.
    - And beside that bowing down to a golden idol sends a message.
- Choosing to worship something besides the living God, says something about his primacy in our hearts.
  - Our actions, our choices, our speech - it reflects upon our God.
    - The way that we *live* communicates something about the God we *live for*.
    - There is certainly Christian liberty in many situations.
      - But the world is watching.
      - What would it communicate if Daniel’s friends bowed down to this idol?
        - It would confirm for Nebuchadnezzar that Yahweh was just another god.
        - It would allow Nebuchadnezzar to continue treating Yahweh as a regional or maybe cultural deity.
      - If they chose to bow, their witness to the ultimate supremacy of their God is dead.
        - They would be denying the truth that every knee shall bow to God.

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<sup>18</sup> Davis, *Daniel*, 51: “This means that the story is first-commandment material (Exod. 20:3). The way is then clear, if costly, for God’s people. The writer holds before you this episode because he wants you to make the same response as Daniel’s friends: I will believe and obey the first commandment even if it kills me (and it may). That is the concern of the story.”

- Like I said earlier If you haven't already, you will find yourself confronted with a choice like this.
- You will be tempted to blunt the edge of scripture's commands.
  - You might be asked to lie to your parents about something.
  - You might be asked to cut dangerous corners at work to make a deadline.
  - Maybe your friend will ask you to read a book with her that you know you shouldn't read.
- Maybe you will find yourself with an opportunity to act on sexual temptation with your boyfriend or girlfriend.
- There are countless opportunities for you to rightly or wrongly testify about God through your actions.
  - Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are in just such a situation.
  - They could have easily bowed down to save themselves.
  - They might have even said to themselves, "we're not compromising, we're just preserving this relationship for the purposes of future evangelism."
    - Does that sound familiar?
    - I know I've told myself that before.
    - Friends, God will never ask you to sin for the sake of ministry.
  - In fact, sometimes our greatest ministry is to testify to God's greatness by not bowing the knee to sin.
  - In those pressure filled moments we need to be clear on what scripture calls us to.
- We need to be constrained by scripture.
- **That's our third point Be Constrained by Scripture.**
- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were constrained by the first commandment.
- Let's read about what their choice earned them.
- Verses 19–23

Daniel 3:19–23 (ESV)

<sup>19</sup>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.

<sup>20</sup>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.

<sup>21</sup>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.

<sup>22</sup>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.

<sup>23</sup>And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace.

- Nebuchadnezzar's authority has been openly challenged.<sup>19</sup>
- And he's furious.

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<sup>19</sup> Baldwin, *Daniel*, 117: "The predictable fury of the king at this challenge to his authority provokes him into issuing urgent orders. *Heated seven times more* is not to be understood literally. The writer is using a proverbial expression (cf. Prov. 24:16; 26:16)."

- His face is twisting into rage.
  - You can picture this in your mind.
- So he orders for the furnace to be heated seven times hotter than normal.
- Next he orders for the three men to be bound and thrown into the furnace.
- Daniel includes the detail that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were bound while wearing their clothes.<sup>20</sup>
  - It was common to remove the clothing of those being executed as a way of increasing shame.<sup>21</sup>
- But the King couldn't even bear to wait for this step to be taken.
- And when the soldiers approached the furnace, the flames were so intense that they were killed.
  - And the three Hebrew men fall into the burning fiery furnace.
  - The rebels have been destroyed and the king begins to cool off.
- Nebuchadnezzar sits down after reestablishing control of the situation.
- But he doesn't stay sitting for long.
- Look what happens next.

#### Daniel 3:24 (ESV)

<sup>24</sup>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."

<sup>25</sup>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."

- Nebuchadnezzar shoots up out of his chair in astonishment.
  - He does a quick sanity check, asking those around him how many people actually got cast into the fire.
- They confirm - "We only threw three guys into the fire."
  - But Nebuchadnezzar sees another individual in the fire with them.
    - And this fourth person is different.
    - We're not told exactly what makes Nebuchadnezzar say that the appearance of the fourth man is like a son of the Gods.
      - We're actually told very little about this person.
        - But there must have been some feature to make the king recognize that this person was not merely human.
    - I wish we were told explicitly who this is.

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<sup>20</sup> Sprinkle, *Daniel*, 104: "Though exact identifications are uncertain, these items of clothing are mentioned to indicate that the Jewish men were cast into the furnace fully dressed in flammable garb. This prepares for v. 27 where none of these materials were affected by the fire, thus emphasizing the extent of God's miracle."

<sup>21</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, "Daniel," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1340: "It was customary to remove the clothing of those being executed, but because of the haste in which the king wanted his command carried out (**the king's command was ... urgent**) this practice was not followed this time."

- But the truth is it's a bit open to interpretation.
- I can tell you that there are two main theories about who this fourth man is.
  - Some people think it's an angel.
  - Some people think it's pre-incarnate Christ.<sup>22 23</sup>
    - Meaning a physical manifestation of God himself prior to the birth of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>24</sup>
- I personally am not persuaded that this is pre-incarnate Christ.
  - I admit it would be pretty satisfying if this was Jesus saving his people from the flames of judgement.
- But I don't think we have enough evidence from the text to claim with certainty that this is Jesus.
- Remember we're working with words spoken by a polytheistic pagan.<sup>25</sup>
  - He doesn't know a thing about Jesus.<sup>26</sup>
    - And the way that he describes this figure shows that to be the case.
- He simply says that this figure resembles some sort of divine being.
  - This description is similar to how other angels are described in the book of Daniel.
    - The angels throughout the rest of the book are described using phrases like:
      - A holy one who came down from heaven
      - One having the appearance of man
      - A man clothed in linen.
      - One in the likeness of the children of man
- You could make the case that these might all be Jesus.
  - But Jesus confirms only one of them as being a reference to himself.
    - He says in Matthew 26:64:

Matthew 26:64 (ESV)

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<sup>22</sup> Sprinkle, *Daniel*, 105: "The KJV rendering of v. 25 supports a specifically christological interpretation when it says the fourth figure is "like the Son of God" (contrast CSB "like a son of the gods"). The KJV thus identifies this figure with Jesus Christ, though "the Son of God" here appears anachronistic. Even if "like a son of the gods" is the correct translation, "a son of the gods" to Nebuchadnezzar would be a "divine being."

<sup>23</sup> Pentecost, *Daniel*, 1340: "This One was probably the preincarnate Christ. Though Nebuchadnezzar did not know of the Son of God, he did recognize that the Person appearing with the three looked supernatural.

<sup>24</sup> Hamilton, James M. *With the Clouds of Heaven: The Book of Daniel in Biblical Theology*. New Studies in Biblical Theology 32. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2014, 136.

<sup>25</sup> Miller, *Daniel*, 123: "Nebuchadnezzar was polytheistic and had no conception of the Christian Trinity. Thus the pagan king only meant that the fourth figure in the fire was divine."

<sup>26</sup> House, *Daniel*, 85: "Who, or what, is this fourth figure? Nebuchadnezzar calls the being God's 'angel', or 'messenger', in 3:28. It is important to remember who is speaking and under what circumstances (Longman 1999:111–112). Nebuchadnezzar is still learning about the living God. He still believes in many gods (see 3:13–15; 4:8). Thus, it is most likely that he describes a being whom he believes resembles deity (Archer 1985:57), one who fits the category of a divine being (Collins 1993:190). He does not confess seeing a messianic figure, nor is this a pre-incarnate visitation by God the Son, as Miller argues (1994:123–124)."

<sup>64</sup>Jesus said to him, “You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

- That’s an exact reference to Daniel 7:13 which reads:

Daniel 7:13 (ESV)

<sup>13</sup>“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.

- Jesus is clearly picking up Daniel’s words and saying “this is about me”.
- And I think that if Daniel intended for us to know that the fourth figure was pre-incarnate Christ, he would have done more to tie this fourth figure to the one confirmed reference to Jesus.<sup>27</sup>
- Now I want you to hear me say this - the identity of this person isn’t important to the interpretation of the text.
- Because wherever you fall on this question we can all agree on this.
  - Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego have been saved by the almighty God.
- Let’s see how Nebuchadnezzar reacts:

Daniel 3:26–27 (ESV)

<sup>26</sup>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.

<sup>27</sup>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.

- Nebuchadnezzar approaches the furnace and calls the men out.
  - Remember that question he asked back in verse 15?
    - When he asked “who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?”
    - Now he knows that Yahweh is able to deliver his people out of the hands of Nebuchadnezzar.
- He calls the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego “the Most High God”.<sup>28</sup>
- I love the symmetry here in this chapter as well.

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<sup>27</sup> For more on this see chapter 6 of *With the Clouds of Heaven* by James Hamilton.

<sup>28</sup> Sprinkle, *Daniel*, 106: “The Babylonian king of Isa 14:14 tried to make himself as exalted as the Most High. But Nebuchadnezzar began to recognize that the Most High God is a sovereign superior to him.”

- Some scholars say that this chapter is chiastically structured, which I think is true and you can see it here.<sup>29</sup>
- At the beginning of the chapter the government officials were gathered and heard a decree to worship a false god.
- At the end of the chapter they're gathered to heard a decree concerning the one true God.<sup>30</sup>
- Let's look at that decree in verses 28–29:

Daniel 3:28–29 (ESV)

<sup>28</sup>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.

<sup>29</sup>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.”

- Nebuchadnezzar breaks into this statement of praise for God
  - And he commends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego for trusting in God.
  - They could have tried to save themselves.
  - They could have submitted to Nebuchadnezzar’s command and just bowed to the idol.
  - But they didn’t.
  - They trusted in God, not in themselves or the power of someone else.
- These men, followed the same equation for salvation that all must follow to escape death and eternal damnation.
  - Trust in God and nothing else.
  - Just like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego we must depend on his deliverance.
- That’s our last point tonight.
  - **Depend on his deliverance.**

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<sup>29</sup> Sprinkle, *Daniel*, 93: “Lucas proposes the following chiastic structure for this passage:

- A Nebuchadnezzar’s decree to worship the golden image (3:1–7)
- B The Jews accused (3:8–12)
- C The Jews threatened (3:13–15)
- D The Jews confess their faith (3:16–18)
- C’ The Jews punished (3:19–23)
- B’ The Jews vindicated (3:24–27)
- A’ Nebuchadnezzar’s decree honoring the Jews and their God (3:28–30)”

<sup>30</sup> House, *Daniel*, 86: “God has done a great thing for them. Beyond that, he has done a great thing for those who witnessed this deliverance: the king, *the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, and the king’s counsellors*, indeed all who had bowed before the stele in 3:1–7. This is not just the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, or simply a heroic story about them (Fewell 1988:81). It aims at the hearts and minds of all the people watching then, and all the people reading or hearing now.”

- Who will you depend on to save you from the punishment that you deserve for your sin?
  - You can't save yourself.
  - Your family can't save you;
  - Your good works;
  - Your charitable contributions;
  - None of that stuff does anything to balance the scales in your favor.
    - We have all sinned.
      - We're guilty of that sin.
  - But God mercifully provided a way for us to become un-guilty in his sight.
    - Jesus was crucified, and took the punishment for our sin on himself.
  - Believe in Jesus's death to wipe away your guilt.
- This is the gospel.
- And if you believe this you can trust that your savior will hold you even in these moments of trial.
- This gospel should cause us to trust God just like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.
  - Nebuchadnezzar says that they yielded up their bodies.
    - They preferred death to disobedience.
    - They trusted in the Lord's provision both in life and death.
  - I want to be like that.
- Nebuchadnezzar sees something here.
  - He's on such an interesting journey.
  - Something is changing in him but he doesn't quite get it yet.
- If you were expecting an amazing salvation moment where Nebuchadnezzar breaks down in tears and confesses his disobedience, sorry to disappoint.
  - Instead he does what makes sense to him and threatens to remove the limbs of anyone who speaks a word against Yahweh.
- He's still trying to compel certain behaviors by means of violence.
- He then promotes Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.
- And that's where our story ends.
  - But I want to point out - it doesn't always work like this.
  - God doesn't always chose to save.
- Sometimes God picks the hard road for those who follow him.
  - God saved Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and then blesses them with favor from the king.
- But sometimes people who hold fast to their faith suffer in the process.
  - There was an early church father named Polycarp who suffered for his faith.
- He was living under Roman rule during a time when Christians who were accused of failing to worship pagan gods, would be punished.<sup>31</sup>
  - He was 86 when he was accused and apprehended.
  - Because of his age the Roman guard treated him with care and honor.
    - Rather than making him walk to his trial they had him ride in a carriage.

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<sup>31</sup> Gonzalez, Justo L. *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*. The Story of Christianity Ser, v. 1. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010. 54.

- One of the older soldiers sat next to him and said:
  - “What harm is done if one says that Caesar is Lord? Go on, make a sacrifice to Caesar, and then you will save your skin.”<sup>32</sup>
  - Polycarp refused.
- At the trial the Proconsul, the ruler of that region, also urged Polycarp to change his mind.
  - He tried three times to persuade the old man to just mutter an oath and be done with the ordeal.
    - Polycarp refused.
  - Instead he said to the Proconsul:
    - “Eighty and six years have I served him, and he has done me no wrong; how then can I blaspheme my King who saved me?”<sup>33</sup>
  - Polycarp was burned alive for refusing to renounce his faith.
    - God didn’t save him from the flames.
  - Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego understood that Yahweh could have chosen not to deliver them from the flames.<sup>34</sup>
    - But they still chose to obey.
      - They cared more about their obedience than their deliverance.<sup>35</sup>
  - When you are faced with a circumstance where you’re pressured to compromise your obedience, you need to know that God may choose to let you suffer.
- If that’s the case consider yourself blessed to follow in the footsteps of Christ.
  - Earning reward that no money can buy through suffering in the name of your Father - the king who saved you.
- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego recognized that only God could save them.
  - They had no choice but to trust in the only one who can save.
- Our situation is the same.
- Please pray with me.

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<sup>32</sup> Mark Water, *The New Encyclopedia of Christian Martyrs* (Airesford, Hampshire: John Hunt Publishers Ltd, 2001), 125.

<sup>33</sup> Water, *Martyrs*, 125.

<sup>34</sup> Davis, *Daniel*, 56: “So they were unsure of God’s circumstantial will (whether they escape) but were sure of God’s revealed will (‘You shall have no other gods besides me’).”

<sup>35</sup> Davis, *Daniel*, 56.