Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Uncompromising Faith in the Fiery Furnace, Part 2
Scripture: Daniel 3:4-30
Code: 27-11

Prior to the Super Bowl football game, I read a rather interesting story about Ronald Reagan in the L.A. Times. He was about to leave a press conference in New Hampshire and someone fired a question at him. “Who do you like in the Super Bowl?” Without hesitation, the former governor of California and now the presidential hopeful said, “The Rams.” Then a light apparently went on in his brain and he paused and said, “Wait a minute. I’m not running for governor of California anymore. May the best team win.”

It’s amazing how fickle our loyalties are, isn’t it? Dependent upon certain external pressures, we get swayed so very easily by the circumstances and who we want to influence. This is just a part of life for most people. And I hope as we study Daniel chapter 3 tonight we can do what we’ve done so many times already in the book of Daniel, and that is we can learn to draw a line, and call that line conviction, and determine in our minds and our hearts that we’ll never descend below that line.

That isn’t easy to do. Let me give you a simple way to look at it. Our decisions, our attitudes, and our behaviors are determined by one of two things: External pressure or internal principle. Let me say it again. Our attitudes, our decisions and our behaviors are determined by one of two things: External pressure or internal principle. And the battle is going on all the time in our lives between these two conflicting items.

And we’re very good at self-justification, so a lot of times when we succumb to external pressure, we define it as internal principle. But basically, we have to come down to that bottom line. Do we do what we do, say what we say, and act the way we act because we have convictions about it or because we feel the pressure coming from the outside? And are our convictions somewhat altered by whatever pressures are brought to bear upon us?

There are times when I’m in a situation where if I say what I believe I’ll alienate a lot of people and I face that same bottom line. Do I say what I believe based on internal principle or do I succumb to the external pressure and let them hear what they’d rather hear?

When you are working in a business situation and you have the opportunity to make hay, shall we say, to do very well by yourself and close a big deal by simply compromising a little bit, maybe telling a small lie, cheating in a small way, violating a rule that seems to you rather insignificant, do you succumb to that kind of external pressure, or do you act completely and totally on the basis of what

you know to be proper internal principle? Because that's really the key issue as we live and move in this world.

And frankly, the world if it ever needed it needs now men and women who function on internal principle. I don't know about you but whether you're talking about politics or anything else, you get a little weary of people who succumb to external pressures and wind up ever saying what you want them to say.

Now, as we approach the third chapter of Daniel, we're going to meet three young men who functioned on internal principle and they didn't really care what the external pressure was. And as followers of Jesus Christ, I think we have a lot to learn from these three young men. I want you to put yourself in this situation tonight. I want you to see yourself here. I'm not so concerned that you see Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as that you see you here. And that you see how you would respond in a similar situation.

I've been filtering that through my own mind now for several weeks, and I really want to put myself in the sermon, and I want you to put yourself in the sermon, because that is the only thing that's going to make it meaningful for you. It doesn't really matter that these three Hebrew young men did what they did. It doesn't really matter to us today unless there is something here that we have gained personally in the way we confront the world. Do we put God first? Do we put His Word first? Do we do what we do based entirely upon internal principle? Or do we vacillate, and compromise, and act on external pressure?

Studdert-Kennedy, who was an Anglican minister and a pastor at Worster in England, also was a chaplain in World War I. And he has written some very, very beautiful poems that have always been favorites of mine. But Studdert-Kennedy, as well as a poet, was a pastor and a chaplain. And as a chaplain, he had to go to the war, and he had to leave his family. He had a little son, and he wrote a letter to his little son from the trenches of France, where he was in the midst of very serious warfare. This is what he said. Obviously the letter was through his wife for his son couldn't read.

"The first prayer I want my son to learn to say for me is not, 'God, keep Daddy safe.' The first prayer I want my son to learn is, 'God, make Daddy brave, and if he has hard things to do, make him strong to do them.' Life and death don't matter, my son. Right and wrong do. Daddy dead is Daddy still. But Daddy dishonored before God is something too awful for words. I suppose you'd like to put in a bit about safety, too, and Mother would. Well, put it in afterwards, always afterwards, for it doesn't matter nearly as much."

Well, Studdert-Kennedy was right. Daddy dead is Daddy still. But Daddy compromised is something awful. And that's the uncompromising integrity that God calls for, and that's precisely what we see in the lives of these three men, who were able to face external pressure that was literally unbelievable

but make decisions based absolutely and only on internal principle received through the divine revelation that they were taught.

And I say again, and I'm not just talking about the world of politics, or the world of government, or the world of business. I'm telling you that the church of Jesus Christ needs men to whom external pressure brings no fear. And that just isn't true in all cases.

One poet wrote it this way, "I saw the martyr at the stake, the flames could not his courage shake, nor death his soul appall. I asked him whence his strength was given, he looked triumphantly to heaven and answered, 'Christ is all.' " That is the heart of the three young Hebrews, and I trust that God will give you that same heart as you learn tonight from this marvelous passage.

Now, the story unfolds with eight key features, and as Jerry said last time, we did number one, and I told him I was going to try to do number two through eight tonight, and they were skeptical. But we'll see. The flow of the text is a narrative text, and it flows from the ceremony, to the command, to the conspiracy, to the coercion, to the courage, the consequences, the companion, and the commendation.

And curiously, I would just add this footnote. Daniel isn't here in this passage. And I think that is abundantly important to us. We all know of the great character and virtue of Daniel as indicated in the first chapter and the second. We've all seen this tremendous strength of character that Daniel had in his uncompromising stand against the king's meat, and the king's wine, and the king's activities. And I think we kind of felt that Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael - otherwise known as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in their Babylonian names - sort of slid along on Daniel's coattails, and so just so that we'll know that wasn't the case, the Lord conveniently removes Daniel.

And he's not even around when all of the things are going on in chapter 3, which is amazing in itself because this is such a massive event in the kingdom of Babylon. It must have been that Daniel was out of the country on some very important business as prime minister, or whatever rank he had at this particular time. But he's not here and these three young men stand alone, but they stand courageously.

First of all, the ceremony. Look back at verses 1-3. We've already discussed them, but just to remind you. "Nebuchadnezzar the king - " he's the king of Babylon, where these young men, Hebrew young men, have been taken captive along with all that was left of the nation of Judah. "Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits, and the breadth of it six cubits - " that's 90 feet high and 9 feet wide. "He set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. And then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together the princes, the governors, the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

“And then the princes, the governors, the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, were gathered together unto the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.”

Now, what you have here is Nebuchadnezzar making an image, a massive statue to himself, identifying himself, if you will, as a god, and demanding that all of the highest ranking people in the Babylonian Empire fall down and worship him. And as I told you before, the gold that represented Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel’s vision of the four world empires captivated his thinking, no doubt, and so he decided to make a massive statue all of gold to his own glory.

And it sort of symbolizes the monarch and his empire embodied into one great reality, and he wanted everyone to bow down and worship him. Nebuchadnezzar was simply doing what all men tend to do who don’t know God, that is they worship themselves. They invent gods of their own thinking to fit their own mind and their own attitude.

And having established this great idol, and demanded that everybody worship it, this brought these three Hebrew young men into a very chilling decision. Because they knew the Law of God regarding idolatry, and they knew what it was to set up graven images, and how heinous it was to the mind of God, they knew that it was unacceptable, and they knew they faced the reality of making a decision.

Now, you’ll notice that all the nobles had little character, because in verse 2 it says he called them all, and then in verse 3 it lists them all over again, almost in a sarcastic way, and says they “all stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.”

In other words, typically, all of these leading politicians, and all of the hierarchy of Babylon was willing to do whatever it took to get the approval of Nebuchadnezzar. They would compromise all of their convictions, whatever other deities they may or may not have worshiped, they would set all of that aside to do what was ever necessary for them to gain favor with this man, and to take themselves out of a position of being punished or even being killed because they failed to do it.

And so all the great ones stand there in their typical compromising fashion, and it reiterates them all in verse 3, I think, in order to sort of humiliate them in almost a satirical way as their lack of character is made manifest.

Now, we move from the ceremony to the command in verse 4. “Then an herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O people, nations and languages.” Now let me just give a footnote there. “Peoples, nations and languages” is just a common form of address to speak of a conglomerate of people. It is used again in the same chapter in verse 7. It is used again, I think it’s over in verse 29. Yes, “people,

nation and languages." It's used in chapter 4, "people, nations and languages," in verse 1. It's used again, I think it's in chapter 6. It's just a way of sort of a common way of addressing any conglomerate assembly of people. And so he calls together all of this conglomerate and he gives them a command.

And what is it? It's in verse 5. "That at that time - " and that means "at that precise moment," he wants absolute submission, in absolute precision at a very exacting moment. "At that moment that you hear the sound of the horn, the pipe, the lyre, the sackbut, the psaltery, the dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up."

Now, apparently this guy had a royal orchestra with all of this stuff playing together, some no doubt sensual music, to try to draw everybody's attention to the image and cause them to bow down. It is kind of interesting to note - I'll say this for Clayton's benefit - that you have both wind and string instruments here. There is the horn and there is the pipe, and that means a flute. And then, by the way, the horn had a lower sound and the flute had a higher sound.

And then you have a lyre, L-Y-R-E, which is a harp, and this was a smaller harp with high sounds. And then there is the sackbut, which is very difficult to ascertain. In fact, frankly we haven't got the faintest idea of what that is. Sorry about that. Then there is a psaltery. I mean, there's a lot of speculation, but it's useless. There's a psaltery, and that is a harp with a sounding board. A lyre was a high sounding harp and a psaltery was a low sounding harp. And then there was a dulcimer, and believe it or not, that's basically a bagpipe. And then all kinds of music with all these instruments was the cue. When the music started, everybody was instantly to fall down and worship the image.

Now frankly, people, this guy's really got an incredible ego. He's got the whole nation gathered together, all of the leading dignitaries. He's called out the royal orchestra. They're all ready to go. And when they hit their cue, everybody is supposed to bow down to his massive image.

I might just add that music has always been a part of sensuality and has always been connected with the worship of idols. And like every other good thing that God has given us, Satan has surely used music to promote his evil system, hasn't he? Never has he done a better job of it than our current day today.

All right. Then the consequences come in verse 6. "And whoever falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast int o the midst of a burning fiery furnace." Now, I don't know what it could be except a burning fiery furnace if it was a fiery furnace, so we assume that the burning is set there for the intensification so you'll understand that it's a superlative approach that he makes. Anybody who refuses to bow down constitutes a treasonous act and will be thrown into the fiery furnace. If you're standing in opposition to the greatness of Nebuchadnezzar, that's all for you.

Well, most people respond to external circumstances and external pressure. They conform to whatever is required of them rather than internal principle. So verse 7 says, “Therefore at that time - ” that precise moment “ - when all the people heard the sound of the horn, the pipe, the lyre, the sackbut, the psaltery, and all kinds of music, all the people, the nations and the languages - ” there they are again “ - fell down and worshipped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.”

Now you what to meet a pile of non-thinking, intimidated people, that’s them. Typical approach to life. You do whatever you need to do to get whatever you need to get, living on the lowest level, compromising internal principle based on external pressure. Men invariably bow to the system. They bow to the powers that be. They do whatever they have to do. Afraid to lose their position, and so they compromise.

But, it doesn’t tell us but we know that in the white spaces here something else was going on. Everybody was down except three guys, and boy, would they ever stick out. They didn’t go down. And so we move to the ceremony, to the command, to the conspiracy in verse 8, the conspiracy. Now watch this.

“Wherefore at that time certain Chaldeans came near, and accused the Jews.” Now I told you when we first started to study this book that there were probably as many as 75, at least, young men who were taken from the court of Judah to the court of Babylon to be trained to work in that court in the matter of Jewish affairs. But out of all of the 75 - and that’s just a kind of an educated guess, it could have been more or a few less - but out of all of these young men that were taken into captivity who were the sons of the royalty of Judah, only 4 of them ever are presented as uncompromising: Daniel and his three friends.

And so we assume that the rest of them just hit the deck with everybody else. They were going to buy the bag, accommodate themselves. They were moving up in the system and they weren’t about to give themselves problems, and so they just followed along. But apparently, from the indication of verse 8, there were these 3 that did not. And may I hasten to add that they were probably about 20 years of age. They were very young. Tremendous conviction for men so young.

Now, I want you to notice in verse 8 a very important word - well, two words really. First of all, “Chaldeans.” The Chaldeans had been kind of the mainstay of Babylonian culture and hierarchy. But when these three young men had shown such great character, and when Daniel had been able to interpret Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, both Daniel and his three friends, remember, got elevated to very high places, and it’s very likely that they were even set above the Chaldeans.

Look back in 2:49. “Daniel requested of the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, over the affairs of the province of Babylon: and Daniel sat in the gate of the king.” Daniel was given a

place of - I think at this point we could call it - the prime minister of Babylon, and the other three were placed in the leadership of the affairs of Babylon, as the province of Babylon. So they had been elevated. And the Chaldeans resented this. They were angry about this. And so it says they “accused the Jews.”

That’s a very interesting word. It means literally to “eat the pieces of.” Okay? It is used to eat the pieces of flesh that are torn off a body, as a rapacious animal would strip the flesh and the tissue off a body and consume it. The Chaldeans came in a malicious way to slander almost in a cannibalistic way, to strip the flesh off, to literally devour to pieces these Jews. So it’s not a legal term. It’s not talking about something of a law court accusation, but rather a malicious, hating desire to tear their flesh. And like cannibals, they came after these three Jews.

And the Chaldeans, of course, I think also we have to remember, were energized by Satan, for they were the basically the priests of the god known as Bel-Merodach, who was the main god - Bel being a similar to the form we know as Baal. And so they saw their chance, energized by Satan through their own false religious system, to tear into these young Hebrews.

Hypocritically, they spoke to the king as if they were defending him. They accused the Jews as if to aid the king in finding out if everybody had obeyed. In verse 9, “They spoke and said to the king Nebuchadnezzar, O king, live forever.” Gave him all that flowery jazz that kings like to hear. “We’re really here, king, just to assure you of our commitment.” They were envious of the high positions of these Jewish boys, and they wanted to do all they could to change that but they came on hypocritically.

Verse 10, “Thou, O king, hast made a decree, - ” and they go through the whole deal “ - that every man that shall hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, shall fall down and worship the golden image: And whoever falleth not down and worshippeth, that he should be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.” And they got it pretty accurate. That’s pretty well verbatim what the king said. They reiterated the standard, and then they revealed the real issue in verse 12.

“There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon - ” and that’s what stuck in their craw – 2:49 - that is what really aggravated them that these captive Hebrews would be given such a high ranking place. “Those certain Jews - Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.”

Slaves, imported hostages, foreigners, and you’ve made rulers out of them, and they rule over us. That’s what really eats at them. And you get a little bit of the insight of the appalling sin of envy. God says, for example, in Proverbs 14:30, “A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of

the bones." J. Allen Blair writes, "Envy in the believer is as rotting bones in the sense that spiritual power and usefulness are curtailed."

This was the case in the life of Saul. He had been a great king, anointed of God to be the Lord's witness. But because of the sin of envy, Saul's life degenerated into utter uselessness. Saul heard people singing, "Saul had slain his thousands and David his ten thousands." This was only a song, but it awakened in his heart the wicked passion of envy. The Song of Solomon 8:6 says, "Jealousy is cruel as the grave." Jealousy and envy is like an acid. It literally corrodes the soul. It destroys the beauty of the soul like a grave destroys the beauty of the body. And they were being consumed by the sin of envy. And so they bring this to the king.

Now, notice that they accuse them of three things, verse 12. One, in the middle of the verse, " - O king, these men have not regarded thee." First of all, they haven't regarded you. They haven't given attention to you. They haven't responded to you. They haven't given you your due.

That's not true. They had faithfully fulfilled unwritten Scripture in Matthew 22:21 where our Lord said, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's." They had unquestionably fulfilled their responsibility to the king insofar as it didn't violate their responsibility to God. They were good citizens. They had responded to the king. Go back to chapter 1 you find out that they had given the king his due.

The second two accusations were true. Verse 12. "They serve not thy gods, - " that was true " - and they don't worship the image which you set up." Now what's amazing, here is this. These three young men knew the price of disobedience. And you have to ask yourself how could anybody put principle so high that they would literally stand there while the entire mass of people went down, they would stand there resolute, ready to walk into a burning fiery furnace? Now that's character, people. That's functioning on internal principle, not external pressure.

Now you just think about the pressure. You think about it. Nebuchadnezzar was their friend. Nebuchadnezzar was their benefactor. Their destiny was in his hands. Resisting Nebuchadnezzar would be utterly useless. They have no other resource. Future advancement in their careers in Babylon were absolutely dependent upon their allegiance. They could have said to themselves, "An idol is nothing, anyway, so why do we worry about it? We'll just kneel down with everybody else, only we'll pray to the true God."

They could have said, "Everybody's doing it. If we're going to reach people we've got to be part of them." They could have said, "Well, you know, the fire tends to be fatal, and if we're dead we're not real useful to God, and we're in such a strategic place if we get burned up it's just going to mess up the whole plan."

And they also could have thought, “Well, if we don’t bow down, we’re going to play into the hands of these jealous Chaldeans.” And they may have thought for a moment that death wasn’t in their contract.

There were lots of things that could have come to bear upon them as pressures, but in spite of all of this they were resolute and absolutely uncompromising. It’s amazing the situation they were in to take such a firm stand. Stephen Girard, the unbelieving millionaire of Philadelphia, years past, told his clerks one Saturday that they had to come the next day and unload a shipment which had just arrived. Well, the next day was Sunday. One young man stepped up to the desk and said nervously, “Mr. Girard, I can’t work on Sunday.” “Well, sir,” replied the employer, “if you can’t do as I wish, we can separate.”

“I know that, sir,” said the young man. “And I know, too, that I have a widowed mother to care for, but I cannot work on Sunday.”

“Very well,” said Mr. Girard, “go to the cashier’s desk and he’ll settle with you.”

For three long weeks the biographer says the young man tramped the streets looking for work, and one day a bank president asked Girard to name a suitable person for cashier of a new bank about to be started. After reflecting a moment, Girard named the young man he had just fired.

“But I thought you said you fired him,” said the bank president. “I did,” retorted Gerard, “because he wouldn’t work on Sunday. And I tell you, the man that will lose his job on account of principle is the man with whom you can trust your money.”

You know, you have to kind of ask yourself the question if you’re in Nebuchadnezzar’s situation, why bother about three guys, right? You’ve got everybody else down. What’s the sweat? But have you ever noticed egomania can’t stand one person that doesn’t conform? One person is all it takes to make them literally livid, let alone three. And so Nebuchadnezzar was never satisfied with everybody but three. Megalomaniacs are never satisfied with anything less than everybody, period.

And so, the conspiracy. From the conspiracy, we go to the fourth feature in this narrative, the coercion. And by coercion here, we find Nebuchadnezzar confronting the three, and trying to coerce them into a response that is more fitting. But we find them to be unshakeable. Notice, we’ll read 13-15, follow along. “Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury - ” now that shows you what kind of a guy he was. He is - those words are strong words. He is a raving maniac because these three Hebrews won’t bow down. You’d have to figure to yourself, you know, “All these thousands are down. I’m not going to worry about those three. I’ve got a pretty good majority going.”

But not if you're a man like Nebuchadnezzar. He is in an absolute fury and he commands to be brought to him Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and then they brought these men before the king. "And Nebuchadnezzar spoke and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up?"

Notice he dropped the first accusation that they made in verse 12 that they don't regard the king, because he knew that wasn't true. So he just dropped that first one. But he said, "Is it true that you don't worship and serve my gods, and you won't bow down to the golden image?"

And then he goes through this whole routine again. "Now, if you be ready that at that time you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, sackbut, psaltery, dulci - " he must have memorized this speech " - and all kinds of music, fall down and worship the image which I have made; but if you worship not, you shall be cast in the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace."

And then he adds this stupid statement. "And who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?" Boy, he's really getting carried away. "Who is that God that will deliver you out of my hands?" He's got a short memory, this guy. Has he forgotten the same God that was able to reveal dreams and visions? What a maniac.

"Is it true - " he says. "Is this really true - " verse 14 " - that you won't do this?" And in his favor, I guess, he is a somewhat just man. He at least gives them a chance to speak for themselves before he throws them into the fiery furnace based on the accusation of the Chaldeans. I'm sure he knew that they were a little upset about what was going on politically, anyway.

And his pomp makes him furious, and he is white-hot at this particular point, and he goes to the point of actually putting himself against God, and pitting his power against the power of God. "Who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?"

O the folly and the stupidity of that kind of pride. When you pit yourself against the eternal God, you have met your match, and he meets his match in this chapter and in succeeding ones, as we shall see. Had he forgotten that Daniel's God was greater than all the gods of Babylon, including his own gods who couldn't answer his dreams and help him in any way, shape or form? It seems as though the idolatrous fool in the midst of his egomania had forgotten that.

We go, then, from the ceremony, to the command, to the conspiracy, to the coercion, and finally the courage, verse 16. And this is the climax, it's just fabulous. "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king - " now, we're right there, folks, what are they going to say? "O Nebuchadnezzar - " they don't give him all that "long-live-the-king" stuff. "O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter." I love that. Well, what does that mean?

Well, basically, “We just don’t have anything to say.” It isn’t arrogant. There just was nothing to say. They were simply admitting their guilt. “We have nothing to say to you by way of a denial, and we have nothing to say to you by way of an explanation, because explanations won’t mean a thing, and so we just are not concerned about giving you an answer at all. We’re standing, and that’s the way we’ll remain.”

They had faithfully served Nebuchadnezzar as far as they could. This was going too far. And then comes the sublime statement. In fact, maybe the most sublime statement any mortal ever makes in the whole of the Bible, maybe the greatest affirmation of true faith anywhere in holy Scripture. Verses 17 and 18. “If it be so, our God whom we serve - ” and that’s pretty direct “ - is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king - ” one way or another. “But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.” End of speech, period, paragraph.

No rationalization, no dialogue, no, “Well, what would you like us to do? Could we bend down half way?” None of that. “We don’t have any defense,” they say. “We don’t have any answer. We don’t have any out. We have absolutely nothing to say, except our God whom we serve is greater than you. And He’ll deliver us out of your burning, fiery furnace, and even if He doesn’t, we still aren’t going to bow down.”

O what a sublime statement. What faith these young men had. What courage. We all agree with that, and it’s easy here in this comfortable place. They were standing on the edge of the fiery furnace. Their testimony was unflinching and unwavering and their faith held true in the worst moment.

Beloved, I submit to you that this is because they were absolutely committed to internal principle. They had been taught the Word of God and they knew that they were to respond in a certain manner based upon the truth of God, and they would not compromise that no matter what the external pressures were. What virtue. And it wasn’t dependent on whether or not they got their miracle. They would accept God’s will even if it meant death rather than be idolatrous.

O I’m telling you, if there’s anything we can give this world it’s this kind of a spirit. It’s an uncompromising, unflinching integrity that says, “I will stand true to my God if it costs me my life.” And we bow, don’t we, all the time to the 20th century idols to gain whatever we want to gain among the people of this world? They knew the blindness of that heathen king. They knew their lengthy explanations were useless. They simply commit themselves to God.

And like Job in Job 13:15, they said, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.” They knew that what happened to their bodies was not the issue, but that their soul had to be riveted on the truth of God. This is for us, people, an uncompromising life that will not bow to any idol no matter what the cost; the

idol of popularity, the idol of comfort, the idol of fame, the idol of respectability in the world, none of those idols can make us bow. There is no compromise for one who stands like this.

God is just as good when He doesn't heal as He is when He does. God is just as loving when He doesn't provide all that we think we need as when He does. God is just as gracious when He says "no" as He is when He says "yes." God is God, and God is to be uncompromisingly worshiped, and what He does is His business. You might sum it up by saying, in God's case, death is as good as life. Right?

Paul said it, "For to me to live is Christ and to die is - " what? " - gain." Death never put any fear in his heart. Death never forced him to compromise. He put his head one day on a block, and an axehead flashed in the sun, and severed it from his body, and he never flinched and compromised.

Listen, the Lord calls us to that. In Exodus 32:26, the question was asked, "Who is on the Lord's side?" In Matthew 10, "Whosoever shall confess Me before men, him will I confess before My Father whose in heaven." In Mark 8:38, "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous generation; of him shall the Son of man be ashamed."

In other words, there is a call for an uncompromising commitment to confess the reality of God and stand true. And the world comes to us over and over again to call us to its idols. We want to be popular. We want to be famous. We want to be liked. We want to make money. We want to get a promotion. We want to get good grades. We want to win somebody over. And so we compromise and render ourselves useless and our testimony negative.

Naaman, 2 Kings 5, was cleansed of his leprosy and he stood before Elisha and this is what he said, "There shall be no god in my heart but Jehovah." Now that's good. Naaman says, "From here on out, there shall be no god in my heart but Jehovah. But in this I pray your forgiveness, - " he says to Elisha " - that when the king goes forth to the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow down before the god Rimmon: in this way thy servant be pardoned." Now, Naaman was so concerned that he not compromise himself that he said, "Look, in my heart there's nobody but Jehovah. But when the king needs help to get his frame down, and I have to be leaned on to get him down there, you please forgive me, because it is not an act of worship to that god." And Elisha sent him on his way in peace.

Is our faith so real that there's no price to make us bow down? Martin Luther in loneliness on his way to face the inevitable hour of excommunication at what is known as "The Diet of Worms," to appear before King Charles V and the Roman prelate, and all of the princes assembled, said this - and it's a great word. Martin Luther, "My cause shall be commended to the Lord, for He lives and reigns who preserved the three children in the furnace of the Babylonian king. If He is unwilling to preserve me, my life is a small thing compared with Christ. Expect anything of me except flight or recantation. I will

not flee, much less recant, so may the Lord Jesus strengthen me."

He took his cue from those three Hebrews. He didn't say, "Deliver me." He said, "If God wants to take my life, it is a small thing." So with these great men of God and others, we stand before the presence of the pressure of the world to bow to its idols unflinching and unwavering. And someone has written, "The dearest idol I have known, what e'er that idol be, help me to tear it from its throne and worship only Thee." No wonder in 1 John 5:21 John closes his marvelous epistle with the words "Keep yourselves from idols."

So, we see the ceremony, the command, the conspiracy, the coercion, and the courage. And now the consequences, and we'll just look at this very rapidly, verse 19. Well, after that little deal, "Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury." In verse 13 it says he had "rage and fury." Now he's full of it. "And the form of his visage was changed." You know what that means? That means he screwed up his face. He was so mad that he began to wrinkle up his face and make faces at them. This is a grown man. Stupid. He is so thwarted in his egomaniacal effort to have everybody worship him, he's just literally enraged, and he starts making faces at them. "And he spoke - " and now he does a stupid thing " - he commands that they heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated."

Now you say, "Boy, he wants that thing to really burn." Yeah, but that's dumb. If you wanted to really torture somebody, you turn the heat down and prolong it. Heat it up seven times hotter just means it will be less trauma. He doesn't even know what he's doing. He's lost control of himself. Here we are in the court full of spineless flatterers and men pleasers, and we see these three young men confounding, and confusing, and turning Nebuchadnezzar into some kind of an idiot. And so he says, "heat it seven times hotter than it should be."

Verse 20. "He commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: and cast them into the burning fiery furnace." As far as we know this, trying to reconstruct this, it was probably a pit in the ground that had a some kind of opening down low, and at the top there was an open hole, and they were thrown in the open hole, though the fire was stoked and fed from below.

And Nebuchadnezzar could have some kind of a balcony that he could look down through that opening in the top to see what was going on. And so the fire is hotter, and hotter, and hotter, and he calls on the strong men - that is the best soldiers, probably his own personal bodyguard - to tie them up and then cast them into the burning fiery furnace.

"And then these men were bound in their coats, their stockings, their turbans, and their other garments, and cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace." Now what's interesting about this is the coats, and the garments, and the turbans, and the stockings indicates that they were dressed to kill. I mean, they were all dressed up in the festivic - fes - they were all dressed up in fancy clothes.

Win a few, lose a few, right? Trying to make an adverb out of something that's not an adverb. But anyway, they were dressed up fancy for the big occasion. And they were all - and the king was so furious, he never altered that at all.

They were all dressed up, and I think the kind of a hint here from the Holy Spirit that they had really come to do what was right as those who responded to the king. They were not rebellious. They were properly attired for such a great event. They just couldn't follow through in disobedience to their God. And so they were wrapped up in a great big hurry. Their clothes weren't even changed. They just wrapped them up and threw them in the midst of the fiery furnace. As I said, likely from a hole in the top.

Now, immediately they knew God was not going to save them from the fire. That became abundantly clear as they were on their way in. Plan B, if you can't get saved from the fire, you hope to get saved in the fire. And that's what happened. So, they knew they were not going to be able to escape the experience, but they were trusting God to suffer through the experience to His glory. Maybe they were remembering the comforting words of Isaiah 43:2, "When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." That would have been a comfort to them, wouldn't it?

Well, the soldiers didn't have it so well. Verse 22. "Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent - " he was completely out of control " - and the furnace exceedingly hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego." The soldiers that threw them in all burned to death. Here they were on the outside burned to death and the others were on the inside having a great time. They died in the fire.

Verse 23, "And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down - " and that's why we believe there was a hole at the top and they were cast down " - bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace." Now, if you didn't know this whole story I could just say, "Come back next week and find out what happened." But we'll move on.

We move from the consequences to the companion in verse 24. "Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astounded, and rose up in a hurry, and spoke, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men - " not bound, but " - loose, walking around in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like a son of the gods."

Now you think Nebuchadnezzar was shook when this started, he is really shook now. He is seated at a comfortable distance, able to see through this hole at what's going on. He looks in there and many things astound him. First he sees four, not three. Then he sees that they are not bound, but they're loose. They're not lying down, they're walking around. They're not burning up and roasting, they're

completely unhurt. The fourth one looks like a son of the gods and they weren't looking for the exit, they were just patiently waiting and enjoying each other's company.

What about the phrase "a son of the gods," who is that? Nebuchadnezzar was a pagan. He wouldn't have known the Son of God if he had seen Him. He wouldn't have understood a pre-incarnate Christophany or appearance of Christ such as we find in Genesis 18. I believe that what Nebuchadnezzar had in his mind with that statement is simply an angelic being because over in verse 28 of this same chapter, he uses the word "angel." It seems to me that Nebuchadnezzar recognized a supernatural spiritual being that he would equate with an angel.

Now some would like to believe it was Christ, and it may well have been. Others believe it was an angel, and frankly, folks, there's no way to be certain about it at all. We know Christ did appear at certain times in the Old Testament, but whether it was Christ in a special appearance prior to His incarnation in earth, or whether it was an angel is really not the issue. The point is, I believe, that God sent that angel into that fiery furnace to explain to those three guys what was going on, and they were walking around, and he was telling them I'm sent from God to preserve you in the midst of this fire. You're not going to be burned. We'll just enjoy our fellowship until the next scene in the drama.

I believe they knew they weren't burning and God sent His angel to care for them. When the Bible says that the Lord says in Hebrews 13:5 "I will never leave you, or forsake you," I think God means that. And I think God sends those who are His angels to care for us in the midst of dire circumstances.

Years before, Elijah had been similarly honored by having God's angels sent personally to serve him food at a time he was terribly discouraged. You can read it in 1 Kings 19. How wonderful it is to know that we go through no experiences where God is not there in divine companionship, and the hotter the fire the sweeter the fellowship.

You know, I can tell you, folks, in my own experience, that whenever I get into a situation where I decide to take a stand for something and it's the unpopular thing to do, and you start getting flack, you have this tremendous sense of divine companionship. It's what Peter talked about when he talked about the fact that when we go through persecution, the Spirit of grace and glory rests on us. I had this overwhelming sense of the presence of God strengthening. And here they were in the fiery furnace in divine companionship.

So, the ceremony, the command, the conspiracy, the coercion, the courage, the consequence, the companionship, and lastly, believe it or not, the commendation, the commendation. And this is very simple to see, verse 26. "Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, and spoke and said, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, you servants of the Most High God." How did he know that? Well, it was obvious he had met his match. "Come forth, come here." I love this. "Then

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came forth from the midst of the fire." You've got to believe Nebuchadnezzar was rubbing his eyes all this time.

And here we go again. "And the princes, the governors, the captains, the king's counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose body the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them."

Now, they did an investigation. When I was in college one time, I needed to buy a sport coat and I didn't have any money. My mother always sent me cookies, not money. So I needed a sport coat and a store burned down in the town where our college was and so I decided to go to the fire sale. I'll never forget that coat. The smell of it lingers with me even now. I wore that coat for about three years in college and it never stopped smelling. In fact, when people would come around me they would just sniff automatically. If you've ever been through a fire you know the smell of smoke that gets into clothes just doesn't ever get out.

And so they gave them this, you know, full investigation and there's not a hair singed, and their garments aren't even changed in terms of being burned at all, and there's not even the smell of fire on them.

"Then Nebuchadnezzar spoke, and said - " now watch this " - Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego." You say, "Ah, the conversion of Nebuchadnezzar." Wrong. In verse 26 he says, "The Most High God." He is not abandoning his polytheism, he's just sticking this God on the top of the pile, that's all. He is not saying, "The one true God." He is just saying, "You got to be the supreme one," that's all. He is maintaining his traditional polytheism, many gods.

And here when he says, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego," he is simply acknowledging what theologians call "henotheism." And that is the belief that certain people and certain nations have their own gods. And in a henotheistic way he has room in his polytheism for the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and he is willing to say at this point that this is the Most High God of all the gods. That's a far cry from saying He's the only God, isn't it?

"Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent His angel, and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, and hath changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God." He says, "I just have to bless the God of these people who wouldn't compromise and wouldn't worship any other god."

And I love this statement, verse 28, "They yielded their - " what? " - their bodies." What verse does that sound like? Romans 12:1, "Present your bodies a - " what? " - a living sacrifice. And be not conformed to this world." That's exactly what they did. You want an illustration of Romans 12:1-2, here it is. They yielded their bodies. And he says, "Blessed be the God who can get that kind of

allegiance out of His people."

Listen, we can set the world on its ear. We can turn the pagan world around in a tizzy, literally, by living an uncompromising life so that even in their unbelief, they will have to say that ours is the Most High God. Even in their unbelief they will have to say, "Blessed be the God of those folks. Any God who can draw that kind of allegiance must be some God."

And then the commendation, verse 29. "Therefore I make a decree, that every people, nation, and language, who speak anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a refuse heap - " and that was the ultimate desecration, to take a person's house and make it a dung pile, a sewage place, " - because there is no other god that can deliver after this sort. And then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, in the province of Babylon." And when you already rule and you get promoted, that's some promotion.

If you think the Chaldeans were unhappy at the beginning in chapter 3, you can imagine what it was like at the end in chapter 3. He says, Anybody who speaks a word against their God is going to be cut in pieces, and their houses will be made a refuse heap." Nebuchadnezzar isn't dumb. He's determined that he's going to be nice to this God because if ever he wanted anything, he wants this God on his side.

One of the coaches in the National Football League was asked why he always had a Christian minister on the sideline. He said, "Do you believe in God?" He said, "Well, I'm not really sure, but in case there's one I want Him on my side." That's Nebuchadnezzar. He wanted Him on his side.

Now, let me close just quickly. You and I will probably never face a fiery furnace, right? Probably never will. But you're going to face trial by fire, believe me, and so am I. And they're going to come from several sources. First of all, Satan afflicts us. He afflicted Jesus and tempted Him. "He goes around - " says Peter " - as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour." He is the accuser of the brethren. He wants to plant evil thoughts. Paul himself said he received a messenger from Satan sent to buffet him. Satan is going to afflict us through the avenue of the flesh.

Secondly, the world is going to torment us. The world is going to try to lure us. The world is going to try to persecute US. The world is going to try to force us to compromise. And, believe it or not, God will even bring trials into our life, testing our faith, right? In Hebrews chapter 12, it talks about how God afflicts us with chastening.

So, we're going to have the trials: Some from Satan, some from the world, and some that God allows; but in all of this the end result is that we may be refined and that we may stand courageous and uncompromising. The hymn writer says, "When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie, My grace all

sufficient shall be thy supply: The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine." You see? Let's pray.

Father, I'm remembering that when a warrior went to battle in medieval times, the first thing he had to do was kneel and 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 the battle. And, Lord, we are Your swords in many ways, and there are times when You bend us over Your knee to see if we'll break. And if we don't break, then You use us to win mighty victories.

May we trust in Your great delivering power. May we allow the tensions, and tests, and trials that come our way to be those things which refine us like gold. And may we not compromise and forfeit the blessedness that is ours when we stand true. And may we know that through it all there will be standing at our side one like a son of the gods, a divine companion, to strengthen us in the midst of battle.

Make us an uncompromising people that like these young men we may stand firm, that the world may say, "Blessed is the God of this person who could call from them such yieldedness." May that be our testimony, for Christ's sake. Amen.

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