

## **Our God is Able Daniel 3:1-30**

What we believe about the Lord will determine how we live our lives. It doesn't matter what you feel about the Lord and it doesn't matter what you do for the Lord if your belief about the Lord is incorrect. In other words, our feelings and our actions will flow directly out of our beliefs. Therefore, our beliefs are foundational. Another way of saying this is if you have poor doctrine, the fruit of that poor doctrine will be rotten in your life.

I have some sad evidence of this. For example, what I am about to show you comes from a woman who spent 40 years on the mission field. She has since renounced her Christian faith and she has just began blogging about her experience.

Because I spent all those years being part of an entity I didn't totally agree with, and when I disagreed with the majority opinion, I was silent. Being silent damaged me. I don't want to be silent anymore.

Because I spent all those years being part of an entity I sometimes felt ashamed of, yet my identity was tied up in that entity so I felt trapped into defending it. Having an identity that was partly formed by something other than me damaged me. I am creating my own identity now.

Because I've been led by Jesus, by the Divine Feminine, by the Tiger spirit that walks beside me, by my beloved Father God, by the Universe, to a broad, sweet, beautiful place of spirituality where I rejoice, and I want to sing from the rooftop about it!

There were two things happening in this woman's life. First, she was part of a ministry, that in my opinion, had some confusing and potentially troubling doctrinal beliefs. I know that this contributed to her issues but perhaps more importantly, she lived with grave doubts and never expressed them. Those doubts were tearing her up inside but she let it happen. Perhaps the pressure of being a missionary combined with the shame of admitting her doubts too overwhelming. But it was clearly her undoing. Her beliefs about God eventually determined the rest of her life.

This morning we are looking at a very familiar story—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego thrown into the fiery furnace. I hope we will all better understand the connection between what we believe and how we live.

*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. 2 Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. 3 Then the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. 4 And the herald*

proclaimed aloud, "You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, **5** that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. **6** And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace." **7** Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, all the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

**8** Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews. **9** They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever! **10** 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. **11** And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace. **12** 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."

**13** Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king. **14** Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, "Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? **15** Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?"

**16** Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. **17** If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. **18** But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

**19** Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated. **20** And he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. **21** Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace. **22** Because the king's order was urgent and the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. **23** And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace.

**24** Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king." **25** He answered and said, "But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods."

**26** Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace; he declared, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here!" Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. **27** And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not

harm, and no smell of fire had come upon them. 28 Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king’s command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God. 29 Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way.” 30 Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

One of the first questions that arises in this chapter is “What happened to Daniel?” The end of chapter two tells us that *Daniel remained at the king’s court* but the statue was constructed “on the plain of Dura,” the location of which is not known but was not in the city proper and most likely some miles away. Therefore, Daniel did not have to face this challenge.

Nebuchadnezzar ordered that a 90 foot, golden statue be built. Where do you think the king got the idea for such an idol? He most likely got the idea from his own dream and Daniel’s interpretation. The statue did not represent Nebuchadnezzar per se, because unlike in Egypt, the kings of Babylon were not considered to be divine. However, the king’s dream focused on an enormous statue with a golden head and in the very next chapter the king built an enormous statue covered in gold. Since his kingdom was the head of gold perhaps Nebuchadnezzar reasoned that the entire thing should be made of gold.

Verse six lays out the scene in stark detail. When the music plays, either bow down to this 90 foot golden idol or else be thrown immediately into the burning fiery furnace. Notice that there are two adjectives to describe the furnace—blazing *and* fiery. It was obviously very close to the image and may have been the furnace used to purify the gold for the idol. This was no mere empty threat. Jeremiah 29:22 records Nebuchadnezzar’s love for the fiery furnace. *Because of them this curse shall be used by all the exiles from Judah in Babylon: “The LORD make you like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire.”* Apparently, the king was in the habit of throwing people into furnaces.



Near the idol the king had assembled the Babylonian Symphonic Orchestra. The list of instruments includes ancient and modern instruments. There are three wind instruments and three stringed instruments listed here, which probably included other instruments that filled in the orchestra. Interestingly, the ESV translates one of these as a bagpipe, which the majority of commentators believe is the correct translation. A trigon is also called a zither which was an ancient guitar without the body. The ceremony may have been carried out twice per day, once in the morning and once in the evening, similar to revelry and taps. The point is that this was an elaborate worship service complete with an orchestra to assist in the idol worship right next to a fiery furnace for anyone crazy enough to refuse.

And thankfully, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego possessed a crazy faith that gave them the strength to disobey the king’s command. And just like what

happened to Daniel decades later with the lion's den, so these three righteous men were betrayed by their own people—the Chaldeans. These men were part of the group of Chaldeans, magicians and astrologers—contemporaries with Daniel's friends—and also raging with jealousy. In chapter two, at Daniel's request, Nebuchadnezzar had appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego *over the affairs of the province of Babylon*. In other words, they had been promoted above these other jealous and less competent men.

I can't preach on this topic without telling the story of something I did on our Haiti trip this past January. One of the boys at "Tom's House" was named Shadrach. For some strange reason I had hard time remembering his name and one day I called him Nebuchadnezzar. The strange thing was that he did not know the story of Nebuchadnezzar, the story of his own name

Nebuchadnezzar responded with "furious rage." Think about a time when you were as mad as you could be—and now triple that level of anger and you would be coming close to Nebuchadnezzar's rage. "Road rage" is aptly named because people are not just mad but rather inflamed with rage, sometimes uncontrollably so. But in the midst of his rage, the king gave the three friends a second chance. The king's command had been that anyone who did not bow down to the image would be immediately thrown into the fiery furnace but instead, the king, perhaps knowing that these were friends of Daniel, gave the men a second chance to comply with the edict.

The king began with a wise question. *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?* It is noteworthy that he knew their names. The official policy of Babylon seems to have been a distorted form of "freedom of religion." In other words, all nations were free to serve their own gods as they desired but they must also include the gods of the Babylonians. For the Babylonians and most other nations living in the kingdom, this would have been no problem at all. For 95% of the population, this would have been an easy command to obey.

This is called syncretism—pulling together more than one form of religion and worship. Haitians do it all of the time. The motto in Haiti is that the religion in Haiti is 80% Roman Catholic and 100% voodoo. Catholics in Haiti use Catholic saints to double as a voodoo idols. Basically, their Catholicism masks their voodoo worship. But the Babylonians did not need to deceive anyone in order to practice syncretism. All they had to do was to add one more God to their pantheon of deities.

You have to conclude that the king was going out on a limb to give these three men a second chance. He was about to cue the orchestra to play again, just for these three, a special concert just for them! Can you see the scene play out in your mind's eye? In the center we have the king and the three men. To the left you can't miss the 90 foot golden statue, gleaming in the sun. In front of the statue, the Babylonian Orchestra is ready and waiting for the cue from the king. To the right is a fiery furnace with an opening more than large enough to toss a man into.

And then Nebuchadnezzar put forth the ultimate challenge. *And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?* It is inconceivable that Nebuchadnezzar would have forgotten the incident with Daniel and the dream/interpretation. He knew full well that Daniel's God was a revealer of

dreams as his own confession in 2:48 demonstrated: *Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries.* Therefore when he issued the challenge that no God could save them, the king was specifically including Yahweh in this challenge. “I know that your god can reveal mysteries but no god can save from a fiery furnace—such a thing is beyond all power.” Last Sunday I said that, had he known the song, Nebuchadnezzar would have started singing, “Your God is greater, your God is stronger. Your God is higher than any other.” He was no doubt impressed with Daniel’s God but he was not yet FULLY convinced of his ultimate power.

Nebuchadnezzar’s challenge is the same mocking challenge that the world screams every day: Who is the god who will be able to deliver you? The world laughs at our God. Case in point is the recent brouha over Chick-Fil-A. If you are not aware, President Dan Cathy was speaking with a Baptist magazine about marriage and when the media caught wind of it, then went ballistic. It’s not like he stood on the steps of the US Capitol building and declared a war on gay marriage. He was talking with fellow Baptists. As a response, Amazon billionaire Jeff Bezos, donated \$2.5 million to a gay rights organization and suddenly he’s a hero. Sometimes I am not sure which is worst—outright mocking or the smug condescension when people turn up their noses at us like we are some kind of circus freaks.

But whatever difficult decision we face, unless the great tribulation happens in our lifetime, most of us will never face what Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego faced. Just as the king was about to cue the orchestra to start playing, they replied, *O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.* They did not need to “take up the court’s time,” so to speak. They did not need to offer a lengthy defense—their minds were already made up. Of course they would not bow down to the image because that is why they were captive in a foreign land in the first place. God severely disciplined his people after centuries of gross idolatry. Do you recall the charts of Israel’s and Judah’s kings? The idolatry that they practiced was far worse than what Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were being asked to do. Nevertheless, it was still an act of idolatry and they could not make that choice.

Each of us are faced with similar choices, always having “two ways to live” in our daily path. We will choose the way of sin, which is often the “easier” choice or will we choose the way of obedience, which is generally the more “difficult” choice?

And then they spoke what has become some of the most famous words in all of Scripture. *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.* This was a direct reply to Nebuchadnezzar’s ultimate challenge—*who is the god who is able to deliver you out of my hands?* “King, our God is able to deliver us.” This was a statement of God’s power. He is able. He does not lack the power to deliver us. The display that we saw with Daniel’s dream interpretation is but a small sampling of his power.

Verse 17 is rich and deep in faith. Think about what it would take to stand before the most powerful man on the planet with your means of execution and your means of escape right in front of you. Which will you choose—fidelity to the king or the furnace? Will you bow down or will you burn? Will you save your neck or will you serve your God? In the midst of this fiery

trial, the three friends expressed faith in God's power. They knew that God was able. They had no doubts that God was strong. Do you see how your view of God directly affects your life? At that moment, nothing else mattered because they knew that God was able. They knew that was the one who removed kings and set up kings and that the powerful Nebuchadnezzar did not lift a finger without the Lord's permission. They knew that God was able.

But if verse 17 is rich in faith, verse 18 is nothing short of earth shattering. *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.* There is no doubt that the men believed that God was able to deliver them from the fiery furnace. Their three plus years of time in Babylon had already witnessed to God deliverance and faithfulness in their lives. And it's one thing to serve a God who delivers all of the time. If God always rescued you then you would always have faith, right? If God always rescued you from every trial and problem, in one sense, it would not take a lot of faith to believe that he would rescue you from the next one. Such a faith would be like the rising of the sun—it just happens. It's what the sun does. However, it is something altogether to know that God is able but in the same breath to know that God may not deliver you.

Verse seventeen showed the three men's faith in God's power and verse eighteen shows their deep understanding of God's goodness. God was able to deliver them but even if he did not, they believed in his goodness. They believed that if God chose not to deliver them, that not only would that be his sovereign right not to do so but also his wise and good choice. The men believed that God *could* deliver them but not necessarily that he *would*. Here is an important distinction between faith and presumption. Faith is knowing that God can rescue but presumption is always assuming that he will, that he must, that it would be unfair and unwise of him not to rescue you. Too many Christians step over the line into sinful presumption when they demand that God save them, heal them, rescue them, solve their problems, save their marriage, straighten up their kids, improve their job...on and on it goes.

Faith in God's strength says that he can deliver me and faith in God's goodness says that even if he doesn't deliver me, that's OK. God is strong—there is nothing outside of his control. God is good—he will always do the right thing. If you don't think God is able to deliver you, then you are doubting his power and if you don't think God is fair if he doesn't deliver you, then you are doubting his goodness.

Which one are you most likely to doubt—God's power or his goodness? I don't know for certain, but I believe that our friend who has renounced her faith doubted the goodness of God. I know of times when she fully expected God to act in a certain way—she almost demanded that it would happen—and when it did not, she was deeply disappointed. I think she lost confidence in God's goodness. And you realize you must have both of these in equal measure, not only because that is how God actually is—he infinitely strong and infinitely good and there is no imbalance between the two—but emotionally and mentally, you and I can't live with a God who is largely one or the other. A God who is good but not strong is like a doting mother—they wish the best for their child but wishing is where it ends. There is no power to accomplish the good. But a God who is strong but not good is frightening to the core. This is a dangerous, malicious and capricious God. He can do whatever he wants to do but it may be good or it may not be so good.

God has the power to deliver you from every trial you will ever face. He is able but if he does not, do not think him one ounce less good. And even if he doesn't deliver you from the fire he will deliver you through the fire. I hope you know that the fourth person in the fiery furnace was Jesus Christ. Nebuchadnezzar asked, *"Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?"* They answered and said to the king, *"True, O king."* **25** He answered and said, *"But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods."* The son of Gods was the pre-incarnate appearance of the Lord Jesus. It did not last very long, but we only imagine that the fiery furnace was also a place of sweet fellowship between Jesus and the three men.

In this case God delivered them from and through the fire literally through Jesus Christ. The ultimate challenge laid down by the king was answered by the king of kings. Who is able to deliver you? Jesus may as well have said it out loud—"I am able to deliver!" Had God chosen not to deliver the three men, would Jesus have been any less present with them through their fiery trail?

Do you believe that he is able to deliver you from the fire?  
And if he doesn't, do you believe that God will deliver you through the fire?

Rich Maurer  
August 12, 2012