



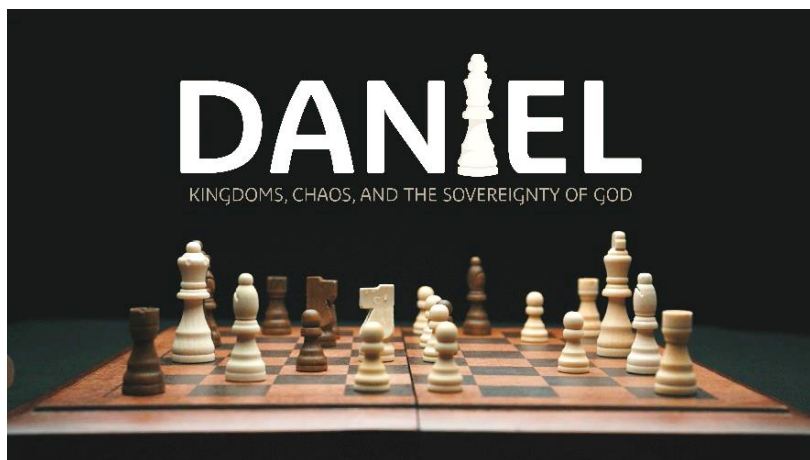
VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

Out of the Frying Pan,
Into the Fire!

DANIEL:
Kingdoms, Chaos and the
Sovereignty of God

Daniel 3:1–30

Tim Badal | January 28, 2024



Open your Bibles to Daniel 3. We're in week three of our series we've entitled "Kingdoms, Chaos and the Sovereignty of God," looking verse by verse through this Old Testament book that was written and lived out about 600 years before Jesus. It is the storyline of Daniel and his friends living in a time and place where it became more and more difficult to remain faithful to their God. This book also serves as a template for us, as we continue to live out our faith in what seem to be days of growing difficulty. This morning I want to begin by looking at the story behind the story.

As we've been unveiling these opening chapters of the book of Daniel, I want us to understand the things that were happening around them. As we focus on each chapter, in some ways we're looking at the fine tuning of the story, but we aren't made aware of the overall picture.

In Daniel 1-6, we have, if you will, a chess game between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of the devil—the Kingdom of good and the kingdom of evil—between the Kingdom of righteousness and the kingdom of sin and rebellion. As we'll see, moves were being made on this chessboard—one move by man and his kingdom, then one move by God and His Kingdom. Maybe a better image would be a game of ping pong, going back and forth. God's Kingdom was being worked out in the nation of Israel. Then the kingdom of the world came to them in the form of the Babylonian empire and King Nebuchadnezzar. They decimated the land of God and took captive the best of God's people. Of course, God knew this would happen and it was according to His plan and purpose.

Right when the devil thought he had won, God gave grace to some young Hebrew boys: Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. The first challenge they faced was that the devil's side decreed these men would be required to eat the king's food, take Babylonian names and live according to their ways. God said, "No, My people won't do all those things." So lines were drawn and by God's grace they were able to stand strong and even prosper, until they were wiser and healthier than anyone else around them. In fact, the kingdom of evil was forced to pay homage to God's men.

So next, the kingdom of evil said, "No, we're the leaders, so we're going to do what we want, how we want and when we want." The Kingdom of God said, "Not so quickly, Nebuchadnezzar. I will give you a scary dream, a dream that was unlike any other dream you've had." The dream freaked out Nebuchadnezzar, so he said, "Someone has to help me with this. I need to know the interpretation." God said, "I'll give you Daniel." Cisco led us through that passage last week.

Then the kingdom of evil said, "I think we need to elevate ourselves. We need to figure out who's on our side." So Satan put the idea of building an image in the heart of Nebuchadnezzar, as we'll see in chapter three this morning. This will force the people to decide which kingdom they were actually loyal to and those people who were not loyal to the king would be eradicated.

You see, behind the scenes in the book of Daniel, there was a cosmic battle taking place. I want you to know from the get-go that God had already declared victory. He did that on the cross of Calvary. But we need to realize that just because God is victorious doesn't mean the celebration was going to take place right away. Even in elections, there's a day when someone is declared the victor, but inauguration doesn't happen that day. There's an in-between time. In a similar way, we're living now in the in-between—between Christ's victory on the cross and the consummation of that victory when He comes and everything is put under His feet.

Daniel reminds us that we're living within a battle. We live in a world that is hell-bent on rebelling against God and His Word. Daniel gives us a real-life example of how we ought to live in our Babylon—in our evil empire. It shows how we can live graciously, honorably and for God's glory, but it will require a lot of discernment and wisdom to know how we should live as captives, as aliens in this Babylon. If we do this His way, those who disagree with us or are against us will have reason to listen to us and even promote us. We need this kind of truth and wisdom.

So before we get to Daniel 3, let me give you some insight into where we're headed today. The story is very familiar about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, the statue and the fiery furnace, so we might be tempted to extrapolate from this story that our times are similar to theirs. We might think we're living in the world of Nebuchadnezzar and statues we have to bow down to. We're the Shadrachs, Meshachs, and Abednegos today. But maybe that's not quite accurate.

Each morning I spend time reading the headlines. Most of the time the news goes in one ear and out the other. I don't remember them. But from time to time, certain articles catch my attention. I read one such article about 18 months ago by Aaron Renn that was published on a website called First Things. In it he described what he called the "three worlds of evangelicalism." I remember where I was when I read it. Maybe you've had this experience, where you're reading someone else's words and you think, "They've said exactly what I'm feeling. They've put on paper what I'm experiencing. They've put to words something I wasn't able to express." Have you ever read something like that and thought, "This person gets me. This makes sense"? I remember reading his article twice, and thinking, "This is what's going on in our world." I would encourage you to look it up online and read it. Now, don't read it now; read it later when you have time.

Let me highlight what he says. He identifies three worlds of evangelicalism that can help define our view of the world today. He essentially says, "I know a lot of you are living in the days of Daniel 3 and I agree that we probably are." I'll give some reasons for this in a moment. In his view, over the course of the past 50 years, we've progressed through the three worlds. The first world that many of us grew up in he calls the positive world, which he identifies as the time before 1994. That was the year I graduated from high school. For some of you young people, that makes Pastor Tim really old. It was before the turn of the century.

In the positive world, society at large had a mainly positive view regarding Christianity. If you were known to be a church-going person, it meant you were also a good citizen. Publicly being a Christian was a status enhancer. So if you told your boss you went to church, that would be something in your favor. When you told your teachers and fellow students, "I was at church for an event," that was a positive thing. Many of them would say, "So was I." When your neighbor saw you leaving for church, he would say, "Have a great time. I'll see you when you get back." It wasn't so long ago that on Wednesday nights, practices were not scheduled so kids could go to youth group. Those were the days many of us who are older remember as the good old days. These are days we'd love to see come back, but Aaron Renn tells us these days are over. The violation of Christian norms in society changed things. They ended somewhere around the mid-90s. So what was next?

The next season was what he calls the neutral world. Society took a neutral stance toward Christianity. It no longer was a privileged status, but it also wasn't yet in disfavor. Being publicly known as a Christian was neither a positive nor a negative regarding a person's social status. Christianity was a valid option, but not the only option. We now live in a pluralistic society, a pluralistic public square, where now we are one of many. Christian moral norms retain some residual effects. Christianity isn't good or bad, so it's up to you what kind of Christianity you believe. It might be affected by what part of the country you live in. Is it urban or rural, liberal or conservative? Most of us are still living there. Even our public schools might be in the neutral world. Maybe your workplace is still there. They're not against you as a Christian. They're okay with that, but they want to make sure that whatever you do with your Christianity doesn't interfere with someone else's beliefs. So Christmas is now called "holiday" and has all kinds of celebrations.

It's okay to live in the neutral world. It gives a sense of being unified, of realizing your way isn't the only way. The problem is that rarely does culture ever stay in neutral. So our society made a decision: does it stay neutral, does it go back to the positive, or will we go to the negative? It was a battle during that time and it was reflected in our politics. We were being told we could go back to the positive.

Even today, many are convinced that the answer comes through getting the right person in office. If we can do that, we can get back to the good old days. But let me tell you. nowhere in history has that ever been done. Or if it does happen, it only lasts a very short time. Historically, a move from the positive to the neutral, especially regarding moral standards, always goes on to the negative. The negative world, according to Aaron Renn, began around 2014 or 2015.

After that, society had a negative view of Christianity. Being known as a Christian became a social negative. Particularly in the elite domains of society, Christian morality is rejected and in fact is seen as a threat to the public good. When Christians violate the secular moral order, they receive negative consequences. Some of you right now are moving from the neutral in your workplace, school or community into the negative. Now mentioning the words Christian or Jesus isn't a positive, nor even something neutral. Now it brings disdain or even anger from those around you.

Why do I bring all this up? I want you to see that what's going on in the book of Daniel is going on today. There's a progression that moves from Daniel 1, from the positive to the neutral to the negative in three short chapters. In Daniel 1, at the beginning of the book, we have the nation of Israel in the positive world. They're in Judah. They're able to believe what they believe and worship the God they worship. Their laws are all given to them by God Himself. But then Babylon came along in verse one, moving Judaism from being something positive to something neutral. They took some of Israel's greatest young men and brought them to Babylon, with the idea that these men would be assimilated into the Babylonian culture. In Daniel 1, when the question of eating the king's food came up, there was room for discussion and negotiation. The Hebrews were still allowed to hold their beliefs and even live them out, as long as their beliefs didn't have a negative impact on the surrounding society.

However, now in chapter three, all of that changed. They went from positive to neutral to negative, which meant the people of God were going to be commanded to do something against the will of their God...or else. This is a template of how we move from positive Christianity, to neutral, to the world I believe we're moving into now. So how are we to be prepared to live in this negative world?

Let's read verses one through seven. *"King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits."* A cubit was about the length of a man's forearm, so that would make this statue about 90 feet tall and about nine feet around. That's a pretty big statue! *"He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon."* On a modern map of the nation of Iraq, you'll see Baghdad, the capital city, then about ten miles to the southwest is the plain of Dura. For those who lived during the second Gulf War, two cities became famous—one because of a great battle that took place and the other because of atrocities that got the U.S. into a whole bunch of trouble. The battle was in the city of Fallujah; the other city was Abu Ghraib. Both of these cities are in the plain of Dura. So this is a real place and this event was real in Daniel's day.

²Then 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.

I want you to envision an event similar to our State of the Union Address, where all the branches of government—executive, legislative, judicial—all of the generals, all the important people come together. Now notice what happens next. They are going to dedicate this statue of King Nebuchadnezzar that had been set up.

³Then 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. ⁴And the herald proclaimed aloud, "You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, ⁵that 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. ⁶And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace." ⁷Therefore, 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.

Let's look quickly at the three main characters in this story. Let's put ourselves in this story, but let's make sure we put ourselves in the right part. So what part are you playing?

King Nebuchadnezzar—the ruler, the one who thinks he's God. He's the one who sought to elevate himself over all others. Right away, there's no God-fearing person who would say, "I'm a Nebuchadnezzar." I'm here to ask, "Are you sure?" King Nebuchadnezzar was all about himself, his preferences, his desires, his pleasures, his pursuits. He wanted to make sure anyone who was around him was for that as well. But is that true of you? Are you all about your pleasure? Are you all about your possessions? Are you all about your own pursuits, such that you see fit to tell others it's all about you?

You might say, "I wouldn't do that, because at some point in my life I pledged my allegiance to God and to His Christ." Well, if you remember from what Cisco preached last week, at the end of chapter two Nebuchadnezzar paid allegiance to God. But now 15 or 20 years later, he's forgotten that homage he gave God and now he's elevating himself. It's possible that you at some point gave your allegiance to Jesus Christ, but now you're living for yourself. I don't want you to think you're Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, when what you are is Nebuchadnezzar. Your job now is to repent, to fall on your knees and say, "I've blown it, God. Have mercy on me."

The second character is a big group—the crowd. This involved the royal delegation that's found in verse two, all the branches of government. This group includes everybody in verse seven—all nations, all peoples, all languages. Could it be this morning that you might not be King Nebuchadnezzar, but you're a part of the crowd. You're just going through the motions. I imagine that many who bowed down and worshiped that statue really didn't believe, but for the sake of their position in the world, for the sake of their popularity, for the sake of their own pursuits, it was expedient for them to just simply do what they were being told to do.

Maybe this morning some of you are God-fearing people who just go with the flow when it's the means to an end you desire. You stay with the group. If everybody's doing that, then you do it too. If they're drinking, you're drinking. If they're smoking, you're smoking. If they're sleeping around, you're sleeping around. Whatever they do, you're doing. You need to ask yourself if you're in the crowd, "Where is my allegiance?" There's no neutral. These people thought they could be neutral, but at the end of the day they were bowing down.

Finally, we have the committed. There were only three here whom we're told about. There might have been others, but this is all we know. Their names were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men stayed faithful to God in the progression from the positive to the neutral to the negative world they were in. And they did this in an honorable way. So how did they do it? Let's look at four things.

It's a set-up.

This didn't happen overnight; it was a set-up. I've told you one of the ways you should study Scripture is to slow down as you read and look for patterns. Look for repetition of words and phrases. There's lots of repetition in this chapter that you might not have noticed. Nine times in this chapter alone we see the phrase "Set up." Do you think Daniel is trying to prove a point?

Daniel is telling us the statue didn't show up overnight. There was a progression and a plan. There was a pursuit. At some point Nebuchadnezzar and his leaders said, "We've absorbed all these cultures, all these religions, all these languages, all these people groups. How do we know they're with us? We have to create something that will be a litmus test to see if people are with us or against us."

It must have come from Nebuchadnezzar's dream about the statue that Daniel's God told him he was part of. There seems to be a similarity between the dream statue and the 90 foot statue they then built in Nebuchadnezzar's likeness. It would have taken years to build; it didn't happen overnight. Nor could all tribes, nations and tongues simply arrive and bow down. There had to be preparation and a tenderizing, if you will. It had to be worked into the system. How do we go from people believing what they wanted to believing what this group wanted them to believe? It had to be cultivated into the culture.

It had to be publicly embraced.

Then we make sure whatever we're going to believe is publicly embraced. The first mention of the statue isn't here in Daniel 3. It couldn't have been. You're not going to get people to just bow down and worship anything. You've got to break it up a little bit. What did these government officials do? They started telling people the accolades of King Nebuchadnezzar. The heralds went

out and said, "Listen to your king. See how great he is. He took over another nation. He has brought into captivity another group of people. The general who was supposed to be really powerful was knocked out by Nebuchadnezzar in just a few short hours." They mounted a big PR campaign to ensure that the people knew Nebuchadnezzar was someone to respect and revere. Little by little, the people embraced that. They would say, "Yeah, we read about it in the papers. Nebuchadnezzar is something more than a human being. Maybe he is the world leader we always thought might come to power."

Notice, however, who led this charge. It wasn't Nebuchadnezzar. We saw in verse two that they gathered the satraps, prefects, governors, counselors, treasurers, justices, magistrates, plus all the officials of the provinces. Who's doing the dirty work? It's these people. They're leading the charge.

It had to be corporately endorsed.

So be careful when an ideology starts to get sprinkled into media until it's publicly embraced and corporately endorsed. The statue is a symbol of an ideology. It's a unifying banner that reveals whether you're with us or you're not. Church, you say, "I will never bow down to a statue." Good. But are you feeling the pressure to bow down to a flag? Are you feeling it in your community? There was a set time when everybody would bow down to that image. There was a whole month dedicated to bowing down to a flag.

You say, "I can take it. My neighbor might not agree with me. My friends may not agree with me. Maybe even my family doesn't agree with me. I can live with that. Good minds can disagree." But some of you are working in the public sphere and you can feel it. This is where Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego felt it. They were at work. In their HR manual, it said bow down to the statue or lose your promotion, lose your standing at work, even lose your job.

Brothers and sisters, we're in a time when an ideology is publicly embraced. We see it in media. We see it in the influencers. We see it amongst the elite. "Live this way. Affirm this. Identify this way." Now corporations and their bosses are saying, "This is it." So who's carrying the water for that ideology? It's not really government. It's corporations and some of you are feeling that now. The HR manuals tell you that you have to do this, you have to do that. Make sure your emails say this. Make sure your pronouns say that. Some of you are starting to feel it. You're moving from the neutral world into the negative world.

It had to be governmentally enforced.

Before you think, "I'm like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in this," recognize that we're not in Daniel 3 yet. We've gone from publicly embracing an ideology, to corporately endorsing it, to it being governmentally enforced. That's where Daniel 3 is. So is our culture there yet? You can disagree with me, but I don't think we're there yet, but there will be a time when that ideology and that banner are put before us. When our government—not our job, not our friends, not our family, but our government—will say, "You bow down. You believe and affirm this or else." Is that coming? Sure seems like it. If we won't bow down to it, they won't kill us—they'll cancel us. They won't throw us in the fire, but they'll make us feel the heat.

We need to be really careful to understand what's going on. We need to realize there's a set-up taking place. The kingdom of Babylon is alive and well in our world and it's setting us up to get us to the point where you either say you're with us or you're not. The Bible says at some point in the future, it's not going to be a statue; it's going to be a mark. It will be a mark on your hand or a mark on your forehead. Then you're not going to be able to buy or sell. Heads will start rolling based on whether or not you've taken that ideology and identification.

The book of Daniel is a template for us today. How are we to be faithful in this world? How do we go to work and do it right, do it honorably, do it in a holy way? What happens when, either at work or in our citizenry, the people above us start ramping up the consequences if we don't do what they say? Is there a day coming? I think so. Is it here yet? No. But I think it's coming.

Don't be surprised if the world says shut up.

The world is going to say, "Okay, shut up." What was the image that said, "Shut up"? The statue. The ideology. The people had a decision to make. Will they bow? There was a moment when everybody bowed, but these three remained standing. Holy moly, what courage! Why were they so courageous? Consider three reasons.

They were a minority.

First, they were minorities in this crowd. They were Hebrews in a Babylonian world. You and I are Christians in a non-Christian world. So we're already in the minority. It's already hard enough to live out your faith. Now you're going to be singled out. So they had to work beyond, "I'm a minority here."

There was peer pressure.

Notice, Daniel seems to want us to feel the heat and pressure of "all the peoples, all the languages, all the nations." He says it numerous times. Everybody bowed except for three. Get that image into your head. Think about how conspicuous you are. You're standing up, you're looking around, then you're like, "Shadrach?" "Yeah, Meshach." "Abednego? We're by ourselves."

Their courage was seen.

They no doubt could smell and maybe even feel the heat of the furnace. That furnace was burning and they knew that by standing up, they were dead men. Yet they stood. What's the decision they made? Let's pick up our passage with verse eight:

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?"

Then Nebuchadnezzar gave them a second chance. "Maybe you didn't hear it. Maybe you didn't get the memo. I'll give you a do-over."

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."

This is an opportunity for you to stand up.

Don't be surprised when the world tells you to shut up and do what you're told but understand that this is an opportunity to stand up. That's what they did. They stood up and they stood tall. What was the decision at hand? Bow down and live. Don't bow down and die. Simple decision, black and white. Do you think there were some in the crowd who thought there was a third option? The third way is this. "I'll go through the motions, but I won't believe it. I'll go through the motions and keep my popularity. I'll live an undercover Christian life. I don't buy this. I'm not with them, but I'll bow down so I can live to see another day."

Let me get a little closer to home. "I'll bow down, because that's called tolerance." Let me poke a little harder. "I'll bow down because if I don't, my children who bowed down won't think I love them. They'll think I'm judgmental." Are we hitting close to home today, folks? It's amazing what we as Christians will do when the pressure is on.

In a black and white situation, we'll create a gray area. With Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, there wasn't one. "You will have no other gods before me." This isn't gray. It's black and white. What we as Christians do today is think there has to be a third way. Let's just bow down, but don't believe it. That's hogwash. If you're bowing down, you're sinning. We need to recognize we're either going to be those who stand up, or we're going to be those who turn our backs to the living and true God, going with the gods of this world. Nebuchadnezzar is smarter than most Christians. He knows this image says, "You're either with me or you're not."

These men knew what God's Word said: "You will love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength" (Deuteronomy 6:5). They said, "If that means we've got to die, we die. I can assure you, come hell or high water, I'm not bowing down." We need Shadrachs, Meshachs, and Abednegos in the days to come.

So how do you get there, church? I want you to draw a picture of a stool. On the stool, write the words "fearless faith." That's Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. People are like, "That's what I want to be." Praise God for that. But to have this, three things have to be apparent.

You have to have a confession or creed.

The first leg of the stool is a confession or creed. For these three men, it was the *Shema*. It was the Torah. God is a jealous God. No graven images. That's a no-no. That's a non-negotiable. But it's not enough for you to be in a Christian home. It is not enough for you to be part of a good Christian church. You will not be a Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in your day if all you're holding to is your parents' beliefs or your pastor's beliefs. Those men did not have their parents or their pastor with them. You have to believe this for yourself.

You have to have conviction.

The second leg of the stool is conviction. You have to want this. So the prayer of Amanda and me for our three boys is that our children won't have the beliefs of their parents in name only, but it will be their own conviction. That they really believe it. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were 700 miles away from home and they said, "This is our belief."

You have to have courage.

It's not enough for you just to have a conviction. A lot of you have a creed: "I will believe God. I will serve God. I will honor God." You have a conviction. "This is what I believe. This is what I hold to firmly." Then the boss comes into your office and says, "I want you to do something directly in opposition to the Scripture," and you cave. The reason is because you don't have courage. You're like, "Well, Tim, I'm not built like you. I'm not a fighter like you are." Well, I want you to know that courage comes in direct proportion to your conviction about the creeds and confessions you hold from God's Word.

Mary wasn't a strong fighter, but she knew what she believed. She understood what God had taught and she had the courage to face her world in an impossible situation, because she had rehearsed it again and again. Some of you are ready to fight the battle of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. You say, "I'll stand when I need to, but right now I don't need to." Baloney. You'll bow like the rest of them. But if you will rehearse God's Word in your heart, if you will make it your conviction and allow it to saturate your life, when the going gets tough, the tough will get going. The tough will stand. It will be amazing what might happen.

These men stood up and what happened? They got thrown into a fire. Look at the text:

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.

Who knows how God will show up?

"Then..." Underline that word in verse 19. What happens when you stand up? God will show up. Now, these guys didn't know how God would show up. They had no idea, but they knew their Scriptures. Isaiah wrote something that I think gave them confidence to say, "We don't know what could happen, but maybe this might." Isaiah 43:2 says, "*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through the fire...*"

Aha! Hey, boys, remember in Awana when we memorized this verse in Isaiah? Could this be? Maybe. Let's give it a shot. It's not been recorded this way, but let me speculate for a moment. Are they praying Isaiah 43? "Lord, when we walk through the fire, we'll not be burned. The flames will not set us ablaze, for You are our Lord and our God, the Holy One of Israel, our Savior." Or

maybe, "God, You might not do that; maybe You'll just take us to glory. Either way, it's a win-win. So throw us into the fire and let God show up." And He did!

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 harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them. ²⁸ Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God."

How did God show up? First of all, God physically showed up. There were not three guys in the furnace; there were four. We call that a Christophany—a pre-Bethlehem appearance of the second Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ. So when you have to face troubled times in this world, realize that Jesus' words are true: "I will never leave you nor forsake you. Surely I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Hebrews 13:5).

Second, when we stand up and allow God to show up, God uses our stand to change lives. The king's life was changed. The leaders' lives were changed. Notice the final part of our text today:

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.

And thus the story ends. Could it be, my friends, that amidst this negative world we live in, God may be calling you to stand up. Notice quickly how they stood up. They did so honorably. They didn't call names. They didn't create a lobbying group. They didn't protest with signs. They just stood and said, "What you're asking, I can't do. With all due respect, I can't and I won't do this."

Could it be that we're not making an impact in the world because we are more about bloviating than not bowing? Are we a lot of bluster instead of true belief? Could it be that what God is calling us to is to stand up amidst troubled times in an honorable and holy way, so that it's not we who show up, but God. When God shows up, we have nothing to fear. When God shows up, no matter what He plans to do, He has a purpose (Romans 8:28).

As you can see, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not have their lives ended that day. They went on following God until God called them home. Whatever God has purposed for us in these days, will you stand firm in your faith, leaving the details, circumstances, and consequences to God, trusting Him. Remembering the Scriptures that say, "What can man do to me? If God is for us, who can be against us? Whom shall we fear?" (Psalm 27:1, 56:11, 118:6; Hebrews 13:6; Romans 8:31).