

# It's Cool In the Furnace

*Daniel*

By Dr. Liam Goligher

sermonaudio.com

**Bible Text:** Daniel 3:1-30  
**Preached on:** Sunday, February 26, 2017

**Tenth Presbyterian Church**  
1701 Delancey Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19103-6714

**Website:** [www.tenth.org](http://www.tenth.org)  
**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/tenth](http://www.sermonaudio.com/tenth)

Let's take our Bibles and turn to Daniel 3 which we read earlier. We read all of it because you have to get a sense of the flow of the narrative when we come to these Old Testament stories, the whole thing, which means we're going to go an hour and a half. You weren't going anywhere tonight. Just as well.

If you're following me on Facebook, then you'll know that I posted this afternoon, I posted an excerpt from a comedy routine of a British comedienne and she's dressed up in a business suit, she's obviously at an interview for a pretty high power job, and the guy who is doing the interview is obviously very pleased with her resume. He keeps pointing out that she has experience in this, and experience in that, and how capable she is and so on. And they have really been impressed with her, not only in her resume but in their interaction with her. They're really excited about having her come on board and they are winding up the conversation, they're getting everything to a conclusion and she is grateful. She expresses how grateful she is for the interview and for the job and how much she's looking forward to starting the job. She said, "You know, it's been an answer to prayer for me." And the guy who is doing the interview, suddenly there's a complete blank, "What did you say?" She said, "Oh, I don't think I put it in my resume but I'm a Christian." "Oh." And it kind of goes on like this. It's really kind of very embarrassing. The secretary comes in or another colleague comes in and she is saying to the woman, "We're really really looking forward to having you!" She catches the guy's eye and suddenly she stops. He comes over with the resume and he writes something in the resume and says to her, they both look at this comedienne and her face is absolutely rich and she says, "Is there a problem? Is there a problem?" "Oh no, no. There's no problem. There's no problem whatsoever." "There is a problem." "Oh no, no, no." "Do you have a problem with me being a Christian?" "Why, of course not. It's illegal. But no, no, no. I mean, we don't have." She said, "You obviously have a problem so I'm going to let you off the problem, I'm not going to take the job." And as she's going out the door she says, "When did it become non-kosher to be a Christian in Britain?" And as she goes out the door, the two of them look at each other and say, "Total weirdo! Total weirdo!"

Now, I don't know why I told you that story except that it's helpful to come to these two, there are two great teaching blocks in Daniel and this is one of them and it has to do with how difficult it is sometimes to be a person who trusts in God in the world. You know, as

Christians we say a lot of words, we sing a lot of words, and in our songs very often there are these great statements of intent, "All to Jesus I surrender," and, "Should they take our life, goods, honor, children, wife, yet is there profit small. These things shall vanish, all the city of God remaineth." All of these are great statements of faith and commitment and yet I wonder what happens when the rubber hits the road when we are faced with real challenges to our faith. Jesus presumed that his people would be persecuted for righteousness' sake. He didn't say if they do, he said when they do. Paul asserted that everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. Peter tells us not to be surprised by various trials that come along our way. And it is the simple truth that the presence of truth in the world exposes the lies and the false narratives. We hear a lot about fake news but Christians have been talking about fake news for a longer time than any politician has. The false narratives that people are making all the time all around us, the truth of the Gospel exposes that. The very presence of truth in a world built on a lie provokes conflict because invariably it causes conviction and causes people to feel uncomfortable. That's a reality that we need to face up to. Jesus said that the church of Jesus Christ is the pillar and ground of truth and that means, therefore, that conflict is immediately provoked by the very presence of the church in the midst of the narratives of this present age. Conflict is inevitable. In chapter 7 of Daniel, chapter 7, verse 25, it talks about the powers of this age who will persecute the saints of the Most High, and the word means to wear them out, to wear out the saints of God.

Well, with that kind of background and that kind of reality and that kind of possibility, Daniel 3 helps us in teaching us both the risks and the rewards of obedience to God and his word in a world like ours. It teaches us that obedience, their obedience was not easy. It demanded great boldness and strong resolve and for these people, obedience was not safe. It meant putting their careers and their lives on the line and in jeopardy for God. And we learn three principles: God's people recognize Satan's devices; God's people have to face hard choices; thirdly, God's people prove God's faithfulness.

God's people recognize Satan's devices. There is a saying in English, isn't there, that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely and one of the reasons for that is that power feeds our fundamental sense of pride and arrogance. Maybe you remember someone at school who was given a position of authority in the school, was made a prefect or whatever the American equivalent of that is, among your peers and the very position went to their head and they became the most obnoxious person you had ever known. Dictators are like that. People who are given power, power goes to their head.

And we must say two things about King Nebuchadnezzar as we come to this chapter here. Here is this man and he is an absolute monarch. There is nobody who comes near to him. He doesn't answer to anybody. There is no Senate, no House to whom he is accountable, no Supreme Court to check his legislation. He is the one who calls the shots absolutely. There actually has probably never been since such an absolute monarch as King Nebuchadnezzar was.

And King Nebuchadnezzar comes up with this idea. It doesn't come out of the blue, by the way. He has been dreaming about this great statue and Daniel in chapter 2 has

interpreted the statute to him. In his dream he had seen a statue that had gold and silver and bronze and iron and Daniel had explained, you know, "Those different elements relate to four different kingdoms. Yours is the kingdom of gold and then there will be another one that will replace yours, and then another one will replace that one, and another one will replace that one," and so on. And this had stuck in his mind and he thought to himself, "I don't want my kingdom that I'm building with all my energy and all my skill and wisdom, I don't want my kingdom being taken over by anybody else." So he builds this statue of himself, a great statue made of solid gold, and he erects it on a mound somewhere in the plain of Dura.

So that's the story and what we need to say as we look at the story is it was pride that prompted this. Daniel had said that ultimately all these kingdoms, these four kingdoms of Babylon and then Medo-Persia, then Greece, and then Rome, these kingdoms would all come to an end and God would establish a kingdom that would be an everlasting kingdom. And after he had told him that, Nebuchadnezzar had prayed and praised the God of Daniel. He had said to Daniel back in chapter 2, verse 47, "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries." So he had a moment of clarity and a moment of confession as he heard his vision explained by Daniel.

But time had passed, as many as perhaps 18 years have passed by the time we get from 2 to chapter 3, and in that time, the dreams are now a matter of history. The interview with Daniel is now a matter of history. Time has passed and this man is thinking to himself, "I will not let the God of Daniel set my kingdom aside." You see, pride was in his heart. Pride is the original sin. Lucifer is lifted up with pride and falls from his first place. He had said in his heart, "I want to be like God," and that's the package that Satan offered to Eve in the garden, "You will be like God," and that's the package that emperors and dictators and ordinary men and women are buying into day and daily, "I can be my own god." They would empathize with Nietzsche's statement, "If there is a God, how can I bear not to be that God?" Nebuchadnezzar felt like that and he would do something about it, he would build this statue, he would make people recognize how important he was.

So pride prompted it, pragmatism demanded it. He was building an empire. It was a social program. He was bringing together all these disparate groups of people from various parts of the world of that time, from India to Egypt, bringing them together and he was building this great conglomeration of an empire. So many opportunities with so many different religions and so many different gods and so many different backgrounds for his empire to disintegrate at any moment. There had already been an uprising in the provinces where this statue is erected and that uprising had spooked him, no doubt. What people needed was a unifying force, a unifying factor. What better thing than to introduce, not to interfere with everybody else's religion, let them keep their own gods and their own religion, but why not have something that would unify the nation, some great concept, some great vision of the future that they could rally around? Why not a new god? Why not the god/king?

So he had this vision of something which would bring together. The word "religion" means "that which binds," and he wanted this new religion of his own making to be the

glue that bound the society together. And the project was pretty simple: build an obelisk 90 feet high, nine feet wide, and then on top of that put this great statue. In fact, the archaeologists have recently found the brick pedestal just six miles south of the site of ancient Babylon in a place called Tell El-Dura, meaning "the mounds of Dura" and the French archaeologist who discovered it believed it to be the base of the image that's described here in Daniel 3.

Now, it wasn't just the image. Did you notice the grandeur of the occasion? Did you notice that there were certain people that were invited? You would've noticed that the satraps, the prefects, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates and all the officials of the provinces, and that's repeated over and over and over again. This crowd of people, in case you weren't impressed once, it's repeated several times in the passage. It got really boring towards the end, that's why I let him read it and I didn't read it because it's boring. But the reason for the repetition, the reason for the repetition is to make you impressed with all these very very important dignitaries that were gathered together in one place to celebrate this great figure that had been erected.

Not only that but did you notice that it was going to be accompanied, the inauguration of this great new worship thing was going to be inaugurated by the very best that music could put together? I was so encouraged that the bagpipes were there. When you hear the sound of the horn, the pipe and the lyre and the trigon and the harp and the bagpipe and so on, and every other kind of music. Well, after bagpipes, the rest are just every other kind of music so there you go. They are all there and you've got to get the idea that what he was doing was he was creating an event. He is creating an event that people would have engraved in their minds. They would see all these important people parading with all their fancy robes on and they would hear this great music coming flooding into their ears and they had never heard anything like that ever in their lives before or seen so many important people than ever in their lives before. It would be like the Oscars as they gathered there, except the people there were probably nicer. Anyway, there you go. It was a great experience and it was meant to have an important and powerful impression.

I remember when in the UK we were getting ready to celebrate the millennium and there was a lot of money invested. Tony Blair was the Prime Minister and there was so much money invested, they were going to have this great launch event. They built a dome which is now the biggest white elephant in the United Kingdom. No one knows what to do with that blessed dome. It was all in the end a disaster. But they had this great event. Everybody that was famous, all these celebrities with there. That's what you get first, all the celebrities were there and it was going to be a great jamboree to celebrate the millennium. And somehow or other, Tony Blair had forgotten the birthday boy himself, what was it 2,000 years we were remembering. Until about the day before and Tony Blair got a phone call from Her Majesty the Queen, "I will not be there unless there is a prayer that celebrates that this is the birthday of Jesus Christ." When a Prime Minister gets a threat like that, you do something about it. So hurriedly at the last minute, somebody, an Archbishop of Canterbury or someplace, is asked to say the prayer at the celebration. That kind of spoiled it for them, I guess, but the Queen came out on top.

Well, this whole thing, this whole jamboree here was meant to impress and the pressure was to go along with the feeling of the moment. So therefore as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, the pipe and the lyre, the trigon, the harp, the bagpipe, and every other kind of music, all the peoples, nations and languages fell down and worshiped the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Well, all this can't be wrong. All these important people who are here for this event, they can't be wrong.

There was an advert once that we had in the UK once for some women's underwear thing, and the line for the argument was this, "Can 10 million American women be wrong?" I cannot answer that question. My life hangs in the balance. But you see, this is the purpose, this is why the king is doing it this way. He is creating this impression that, "Well, of course, this is the way of the future. This is the thing you should be involved with. This is the happening thing. This is the next great thing that's going to happen in the world." You see, that's the way the world always works. That's the way Satan always works. He always works in a sense with the masses. He always works with mass media of communication. He always works with the ideas that dominate societies. He works with the ideas and the intellectual property of a society in order to make us think the way we are meant to think.

So there is this first part and then, secondly, we are confronted in this chapter with God's people making hard, facing hard choices. Verse 8, some Chaldeans, there is always someone watching you, there is always someone with an eye on you who is waiting for you to fall, for you to do something that they can get you on. You know, that's just life. I'm not paranoid. I know people are out to get me, okay? That's just the way life is. There is always someone waiting to catch you. So at the end of verse 7, we have this great description where maximum unity is attained. Everybody, everybody, "all the peoples, nations and languages," that's repeated as well just to let you know how impressive this was, how global it was, how total it was. "All the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up." How could you go against that? How could you resist that? So there is kind of a downer to go from total unity, everybody is part of this new thing, and then in verse 8, some "Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews and declared to the king, 'O king, live forever! 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. But there are these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These three men, and they don't worship you or your gods and they would not bow down to the image.'" You see, our lives are always being watched by people who are ready to give us up when the tide of opinion goes against us. That's what's been happening in America the last few years. It may happen more in the future, who knows. Archbishop William Temple put it like this, "The world would not hate angels for being angelic, but it does hate people for being Christians. It grudges them their new character, it is tormented by their peace, it is infuriated by their joy."

Now, what was it that made these men determined? Think about the thinking that prompted their decision. You can see that in verse 18, they saw the issue as one of loyalty to God. They understood that this was not simply a matter of a new aspect of Babylonian

culture. They had no problem living in Babylon, working in Babylon, earning money in Babylon, serving even the Emperor in Babylon. Their God was living God. He was the God in Babylon as well as back in Israel. They did not think of a territorial God. Their God was the God of the whole earth. They could be anywhere and they could live for God and they could serve wherever they found themselves. But these men had been successful in their careers. We find that in chapter 1, we find it again in chapter 2. These men had been very successful. They had risen to the very top rank. That meant they had made enemies along the way. The more visible you are, the more your visibility makes you vulnerable. But this that they were facing was an act of idolatry and idolatry was disloyalty to God.

We live in a culture that is very ambiguous because humans are ambiguous. Man is both noble and ignoble. Noble because he's made in the image of God, ignoble because people are fallen and sinful. That means that our culture, then, is both noble and ignoble. There are things to admire and love and like and enjoy, but there are also these things that will draw you to hell.

They recognized two things. This is the way they were thinking. To bow and worship a statue would be an act of idolatry. Why? Because God had said so, "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make any graven image." It was ignoring that that had led their nation by the time chapter 3 comes, there is no temple left in Jerusalem, there are no walls left to the city, there are no people left in Judah and Jerusalem, they have all been taken into exile in Babylon. There has been utter utter defeat to the people of Judah, and they knew, these men knew, that it was there idolatry that had gotten them there. God had said this is what he would do for their idolatry.

So they recognize that them bowing before this image would be an act of idolatry. Secondly, they reasoned that bowing in pretense, having kind of mental reservation, "Well, everybody's doing it. I'll do it but in my mind I will have a mental reservation. I'm not really worshiping, I'm just honoring the king's wishes." But these men came to the conclusion that bowing in pretense while refusing to bow in spirit would be an act of hypocrisy. You see, they had a very high view of God. They were not going to argue with the king. Verse 16, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, 'O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.'" What are they meaning? "We're not answerable to you. We are answerable to God." In verse 17, they call him their God. Look at it, verse 17, "If this be so, our God whom we serve," they were very conscious that they served their God.

So these men teach us that great faith, great obedience and great boldness flow out of great thoughts of God. The reality is many of us have very small insubstantial thoughts of God, but those who know God have great thoughts of God. They are convinced about his priority, his sovereignty, his authority, his ability, his purity, his majesty. But not only consider their thinking, consider their boldness that mark their decision. It looks as if these three had avoided or tried to avoid an open clash with the king. In other words, they had been discrete. There is no virtue in a display of awkwardness as the world would see it. If we have to resist, we don't want to kind of, you know, call a team of news people

along in order to kind of tell everybody that we are about to resist. Why would we do that, just to provoke people? We resist with sadness and great reluctance but once a believer has been challenged and charged, once they know that there is a point of principle, once they know that they must take a stand, then they are ready to stick their neck out. These men had known this would happen all along. They had known this would happen but once they were convinced that their stand was right, that loyalty to God demanded, required them to take it, then in the words of Oswald Chambers, "They smilingly washed their hands of the consequences."

"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. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image." It's what Peter said, "We must obey God rather than men." It's what Paul said, "I consider my life worth nothing to me if only I can finish the course and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given to me." That was the spirit of these men. Once they knew what God wanted them to do, where the challenge was, where the opportunity of obedience lay, where the path of God's will was before them, once they knew that, once they were convinced before God this is the point, then they embraced it boldly no matter the consequences, without hesitation.

We studied in the summer the life of Esther and you remember those great words, those words that deserve constantly to be written down in the record of God's great saints with great boldness. You remember her words to her uncle Mordechai, "I'm going to do this and if I perish, I perish. I'm going to do it anyway." That's the spirit of faith and that's the spirit of these men.

This is the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Martin Luther and we think of Dr. Martin as he went before the Diet of Worms, challenged to recant his writings. They spread his writings out on the table before the court. He understood the seriousness of the challenge. He asked for a night to go and get ready for his reply. The next day he came to the table, he separated the writings into various kinds of importance and so on, and then he summarized it and he said this, "Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason, I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me."

Or think of Josef Tson, a Romanian pastor who before his exile was called before the communist authorities to answer for his religious convictions and preaching. He fully expected they would kill him. Ministers were disappearing all the time, being taken out to a field somewhere and shot through the head. He expected that to be his fate and he said this to his intelligence officer, he said, "I have to tell you first that I am ready to die. I put all my affairs in order. Your supreme weapon is killing, my supreme weapon is dying because when you kill me, people all over Romania will read my books and believe in the God I preach even more than they do now." That was the kind of faith, the kind of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11 that quenches the violence of the fire.

And you notice that contentment that underlay their decision. You can't read verses 16 to 18 without being impressed by that sense of peace and assurance and contentment. "But even if not," they said, "if no deliverance comes, we believe God can deliver us. We believe in some way God will deliver us but even if he does not, even if we die in taking this step, even if we lose our jobs and our livelihood and our life even, even if not, we have to do this." This is the way of obedience. This is the way of duty. "I can't be content to live if Jesus Christ is not praised, if Jesus Christ is not honored in his church. I have no interest in going on if Jesus Christ is not lifted high." That's the conviction.

Faith is not necessarily arrogant or triumphant, it's humble. Faith does not presume to know God's mind. They could not predict that they would be rescued but they were determined to glorify God whether by life or by death. That's as far as you can get from the name-it-and-claim-it faith movement in the church today.

Well, God's people recognize Satan's devices, God's people face hard choices, and thirdly, God's people prove God's faithfulness. You know what happens. The soldiers take them and we know that near that plain, there was a great kiln that was used to build the base of the great statue, a great kiln to fire the bricks, and it was built at the side of the hill so that you could walk up the hill and throw materials into the top and the furnace would burn them down and there would be a door at the bottom where you could look in and see whether they were being fired properly and so on. So they marched the men up the hill and at the top of the hill they throw them into the furnace and the furnace has been overheated seven times it says, that's the number of perfection, as hot as was possible to make it so that the soldiers who threw them in are killed by the force of the heat.

That's the story. And if we believe in the God of the Bible, then we should not doubt that God should do such a thing for these men. The king is astonished, verse 24. He rises up in haste. He says to his people, "How many people did we throw into this furnace?" "Three." "That's what I thought. Three. Well, how come there are four people in there and one of them looks like an angel or like a divine being of some kind? He looks different but all of them are not only not bound but they are walking around there as if they're having a walk in the park and their clothes even aren't burning. Get them out of there! Would you get them out of there! I want to know what's going on here. Get them out. Get Shadrach, Mesheck and Abednego to come out."

You know, these miracles of the new creation, as C. S. Lewis calls them, are signs of the age to come. They are pointers to the age to come. They break into the here-and-now and they tell us nothing is impossible with God. They tell us that God's purposes in the future are to be believed in because if God can do this for these three men, he is going to do something even more remarkable for all of us. He is going to raise us from the dead. He's going to give us new resurrection bodies. He's going to give us new heavens and a new earth. The paradigm miracle of all was Christ's resurrection when the kingdom of darkness seemed to have overcome him and the kingdom of God seemed to be dead with him in that tomb, God raised him up from the dead.



And their deliverance teaches us a lesson, the lesson is that God sticks with his people in the day of trouble and he brings them through it. Or put it another way, these men knew the presence and the deliverance of God. They knew his presence. Three men bound, thrown into the furnace. When they looked in, four men walking loose and one like a divine being. There is no point speculating whether this was a pre-Incarnate appearance of the Lord Jesus or not, it doesn't really matter. Probably an angel there to be with them and to strengthen them. Where two or three are gathered in his name, there is always a fourth. "There am I in their midst." Did Jesus think of that story when he said those words?

They knew the presence of God with them in the furnace and they knew the deliverance of God. The deliverance was not from the fire, it was through the fire. They could have died there. You need to understand this. They could have died in that fire but they would still have been delivered by God. Their bodies may have burned in that oven but they would not have ended in that oven. They would have been delivered by God and they were delivered by God from this fiery furnace so that you and I can learn that when we go through the fire and we go through the flame and we come to that moment when we die, that is not the end of it. That is God will be with us in that moment of death and in the second, the nano-second beyond death, we will be delivered into his immediate presence.

They knew the deliverance of God in their experience so that we would learn the lesson that there is never an end to the people of God, no matter what people do to you. No matter whether they crucify you, no matter whether they cut your throat or chop your head off, no matter whether they gun you down, no matter whether they burn you at the stake, no matter whether you die in ignominy, whether you lose your job because of your faith, or you lose your life partner because of your faith, or you lose your friends because of your faith. You never lose. You never lose if you're a believer. You never lose because at the end of the day you have Christ. My father used to sing, annoyingly, regularly, but the songs he sang were old Gospel songs. One of them had a refrain, "I have Christ, what want I more?" That stuck with me. I have Christ, what want I more?

The people who know their God are strong and do exploits and in the midst of this world, you know, those men are types of ourselves. Here we are and the world may do all kinds of things to us but we are present in the world to point people to the Lord Jesus. In Ephesians 3:10 it says this, that his intent was that now through the church the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. But your little life and mine with your little challenges, with your failures and victories, your circumstances, however small and insignificant you may feel them to be, your faithfulness where you are is observed and noted by the powers and authorities in the spiritual realms all around. Your faithfulness is a slap-in-the-face of Satan. Your faithfulness in the small details of your life crushes Satan under your feet and makes Jesus even greater in the eyes of those who today see him in glory and worship him.

Let's pray.

*Father, we pray that you would galvanize us to be loyal subjects, faithful servants, and joyful children of our heavenly King. In Jesus' strong name we pray. Amen.*