

Do you remember the television show Candid Camera? It was a reality show that involved hidden cameras filming ordinary people being confronted with unusual situations.

On one occasion, a major university was working with Candid Camera to conduct some psychological experiments on the power of persuasion and conformity. It was scientific study, but it was also very entertaining. In one particular episode, actors were seated in the waiting room of a doctor's office, and all of the actors were wearing nothing but their underwear. In this study, they wanted to see what unsuspecting patients would do when they walked in and saw everyone already undressed – after all, it was a doctor's office. They were surprised that most of the unsuspecting patients entered the waiting room, checked in with reception, looked around and then without a word, started stripping down to their underwear.

People don't want to be different – at least in a weird way. It's easier to conform and follow the crowd and do what others are doing – like taking your clothes off in a waiting room, but there comes a time when we have to go against the flow. There comes a time when we must take a stand when no one else will, and this morning we are going to see three young men take a stand when everyone else falls. That's what this next story in the book of **Daniel** is all about.

Now before we begin, let me set this up. If you remember from last week, in **Chapter 2**, King Nebuchadnezzar had a disturbing recurring dream – he lost sleep over it, but fortunately for him, his dream and its interpretation was revealed by God to Daniel. In his dream, the king and Daniel saw this colossal statue in the form of a human, and it was made of various types of metals from top to bottom until it came to the feet which was mixed with both iron and clay. In his interpretation, Daniel told the king that these metals of the statue represented the empires who will rule the known world one after another, and it all started with Nebuchadnezzar. In this dream, he represented the head of gold.

Well apparently, this went to the king's head, he became more and more impressed with himself, and after several years had passed – being merely the head of gold just wasn't good enough.

So, if you have your Bible turn to **Daniel 3** and we will begin with **verse 1**.

¹Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, the height of which was sixty cubits and its width six cubits; he set it up on the plain of Dura in the providence of Babylon. ²Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent word to

assemble the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the rulers of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. ³Then the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the rulers of the provinces were assembled for the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. ⁴Then the herald loudly proclaimed: “To you the command is given, O peoples, nations and men of every language, ⁵ that at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up. ⁶But whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire.” ⁷Therefore at that time, when all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

Nebuchadnezzar was not satisfied with just being the head of gold, he wants to be the whole thing, and so he erects this **image** which represents his empire – an empire in his mind that will have no end.

We are told this image was **sixty cubits** in height which equates to 90 feet. That’s nine stories high, and it’s **six cubits** in width which is only 9 feet wide, so if you can picture it, it’s very tall and very slender. Now, I don’t know if it’s something like the Washington Monument or a very distorted statue of the king himself – no one really knows for sure, but it must have been an awesome sight because it was made of gold. Maybe it’s solid gold or maybe it’s wooden overlaid with gold, but whatever the case, it’s a lot of gold, and as it shimmers in the sun – seen from miles away, it screams “*Nebuchadnezzar forever.*”

Daniel tells us this image was erected on the **plain of Dura** – a flat area out in the desert which was thought to be six miles southeast of the city of Babylon. Back in the 1800’s, archeologists discovered a large brick pedestal that was 20 feet high and 45 feet square which they believed served as the base for this huge image.

So, with this image set up in the desert, Nebuchadnezzar summons the “*who’s who*” throughout his empire – the government officials, the judicial and civic leaders, the military commanders, the dignitaries – those with any kind of influence were commanded to attend a ceremony to dedicate the image and to

demonstrate their allegiance to the king. There are likely thousands of people in attendance, but Daniel was not among them. In his role as a ruler in Babylon, he was likely sent elsewhere to another country on a mission by the king.

Anyway, at this ceremony, it was proclaimed that when the band played, all the people were to fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Since no god was mentioned that was associated with the image, and they worshipped many false gods – it would appear that Nebuchadnezzar wanted to start something new as a way to unify his people. Now at this ceremony, it was also clearly explained, that if anyone did not conform and fall down and worship the golden image, the penalty was sudden death – specifically, they would be cast in a **furnace of blazing fire**. In essence, it's *bow* or *burn*.

Well, you know the story. The band played and on cue, thousands of people fall to the ground just like they were told to do. Everyone bowed down to the golden image – everybody except for three young Jewish men – the friends of Daniel – Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. They alone were left standing among the thousands in attendance. Surely, these three stood out for standing up, but the king apparently did not notice them, but others most certainly did, and that brings us to **verse 8**.

⁸ For this reason at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and brought charges against the Jews. ⁹ They responded and said to Nebuchadnezzar the king: “O king, live forever! ¹⁰ You, O king, have made a decree that every man who hears the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, and bagpipe and all kinds of music, is to fall down and worship the golden image. ¹¹ But whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire. ¹² There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the administration of the province of Babylon, namely Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. These men, O king, have disregarded you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up.”

The **Chaldeans**, who were among the king's wise men, took notice that Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego did not fall to the ground before the golden image like all the rest, and they informed the king. Undoubtedly, there was some deep-seated resentment against these three young Jewish men – these captives of Judah – these foreigners who were placed in positions of authority in Babylon – they stuck out like sore thumbs to the Chaldeans who were more than happy to accuse these Jews of dishonoring the king even though he had promoted them, failing to serve his gods, and refusing to worship the golden image he had set up.

Nebuchadnezzar couldn't believe what he was hearing. It was humiliating to hear this occurred in public before thousands of people – his reputation was at stake, and so beginning with **verse 13**, the king reacts.

13 Then Nebuchadnezzar in rage and anger gave orders to bring Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego; then these men were brought before the king.

14 Nebuchadnezzar responded and said to them, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? 15 Now if you are ready, at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery and bagpipe and all kinds of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, very well. But if you do not worship, you will immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire; and what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?”

16 Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego replied to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. 17 If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. 18 But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

Obviously, Nebuchadnezzar knows Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. He knows these guys – he likes these guys – they have been sterling in their duties, and surely their failure to fall and worship his golden image was just an oversight – a misunderstanding on their part – that has to be it, and so he gives them a second chance which was surprising for this king.

The king tells these three young Jewish men, *“the band is going to play again, and once you hear the music you need to fall down and worship the golden image like everyone else, but if you don't, you will be tossed into the furnace of blazing fire, and even though your God can reveal mysteries and dreams – there is no god who has the power to deliver you from my hands.”*

So, the king is very clear with Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego and in turn they are just as clear with him. They tell the king, without disrespect, *“O king, we're not anxious about this, we don't need to discuss it amongst ourselves – we don't need to weigh the options to make our decision. For us, the matter is already settled and we will do the right thing by our God. We will not fall down and worship the golden image you have set up. Our lives are in the hands of the one true God who is more than **able to deliver us**, and if for some reason He does not, we are still devoted to Him no matter what.”*

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego made no attempt to defend themselves or give excuses, instead they respectfully proclaimed that their God can deliver them from the fire, but even if He chooses not to, they would still honor God – not for what God does or does not do, but because of who He is.

They had no doubt in God's ability to deliver them, but they also understood that God's plan may be different from theirs and their lives were totally in His hands – not the hands of the king. Whatever God did or did not do was entirely up to God for He is sovereign, He has a purpose for what He does and does not do, and He can be trusted for He is good.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego stood their ground before the king and the thousands in attendance, and they refused to take advantage of this second chance to fall down. Well, Nebuchadnezzar was already furious with them, but now he completely loses his mind. Look at what happens beginning with **verse 19**.

19 Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with wrath, and his facial expression was altered toward Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. He answered by giving orders to heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated. 20 He commanded certain valiant warriors who were in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego in order to cast them into the furnace of blazing fire. 21 Then these men were tied up in their trousers, their coats, their caps and their other clothes, and were cast into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire. 22 For this reason, because the king's command was urgent and the furnace had been made extremely hot, the flame of the fire slew those men who carried up Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. 23 But these three men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, fell into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire still tied up.

This is pretty self-explanatory. Out of blind rage, before the thousands who are watching, orders are given to increase the heat in the smelting furnace that was right there on site – it had likely been used to create the golden image. The furnace was a huge pot-bellied structure with a large opening at the top that served as a chimney and a side door at the bottom for adding fuel and taking out metal. The king then ordered some of his best soldiers to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego – don't even bother to strip them naked as was the custom for criminals, and drop them down the chimney into the furnace.

We are told the furnace was so hot, that the soldiers who tossed the three young men into it were killed by the intense heat, and that should be the end of the story

for if the soldiers were burned to a crisp and died on the spot, then surely the king and his officials, who are watching through the bottom opening of the furnace, would witness an instant cremation.

Well, it's not the end of the story, in fact, it's just getting good. Let's continue beginning with **verse 24**.

²⁴ Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astounded and stood up in haste; he said to his high officials, “Was it not three men we cast bound into the midst of the fire?” They replied to the king, “Certainly, O king.” ²⁵ He said, “Look! I see four men loosed and walking about in the midst of the fire without harm, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods!” ²⁶ Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the furnace of blazing fire; he responded and said, “Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, come out, you servants of the Most High God, and come here!” Then Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego came out of the midst of the fire. ²⁷ The satraps, the prefects, the governors and the king's high officials gathered around and saw in regard to these men that the fire had no effect on the bodies of these men nor was the hair of their head singed, nor were their trousers damaged, nor had the smell of fire even come upon them.

The king apparently had a great view and he could not believe what he was seeing. Everyone expected Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego to be engulfed in flames, and burned to a cinder like charcoal, but here they were walking around *cool as cucumbers*, and the only thing burned up were the bonds they were tied up with. Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego were doing well, they're just out for a stroll, walking on the coals in the fire, in no hurry to come out – and oh by the way, they have company – a fourth has joined them.

We are not told who this fourth is but Nebuchadnezzar describes him **“like a son of the gods”** which is another word for a divine heavenly being. From this passage, the identity of this fourth can't be determined; however, some suggest this was an angel sent from God, while others believe this was a preincarnate appearance of Jesus Christ before His virgin birth in Bethlehem.

There are several times in the Old Testament where it is believed that Jesus, who may have been referred to as *“the Angel of the Lord”* on rare occasions appeared to people – but whoever it is here in the furnace – whether it was Jesus or an angel – one thing we know for sure – there was another in the fire who brought the presence of God. That's what's important here.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego were not alone, and I also need to point out the obvious – God did not deliver them *from* the fire, instead He delivered them *in* the fire. God did not deliver them *from* the fire – that’s what we want, but instead for their sake and the sake of others, according to His greater purpose and plan, He delivered them *in* the fire.

Well, surprise – surprise, the king’s tone completely changes, and he acknowledges that Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego serve the **Most High God** – in the king’s mind, their God is on top of all the other gods, and he tells the three to come out of the furnace, and they do – completely unharmed from head to toe.

Then beginning with **verse 28**, the king has something to say before the masses.

²⁸ Nebuchadnezzar responded and said, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, who has sent His angel and delivered His servants who put their trust in Him, violating the king’s command, and yielded up their bodies so as not to serve or worship any god except their own God.

²⁹ Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation or tongue that speaks anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego shall be torn limb from limb and their houses reduced to a rubbish heap, inasmuch as there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way.” ³⁰ Then the king caused Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego to prosper in the province of Babylon.

If you recall, back in **verse 15**, the king’s question was “**what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?**” – and now the king gets his answer only because Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego trusted God no matter what, and were willing to stand up for what they believed.

In violation of the king’s command, they stood when everyone else was persuaded and pressured to fall, they faced the fire, and through it all, God used it to introduce Himself to thousands of people who did not know Him.

David Jeremiah was talking with a couple one day and he asked them how they came to know Christ, and this was their reply:

“We lived next door to a certain couple in our church, and it was at a time when all of the factories in our area were shutting down. People were being laid off every day and things were really tough. This particular Christian couple had been without work for over six months. All of their benefits had run

out and they were just eking out an existence. We watched them as God literally took away everything they had. We saw them praising the Lord, having smiles on their faces and never complaining. One night after supper we were talking about them, and we said, “Whatever they had, that’s what we needed.” We went over to their house and they led us to Christ. They saw God in the fire.”

You and I will probably never face a fiery furnace like Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, but we will certainly experience adversity and hardship and trials in this life – that’s our fire, and what God chooses to do or not to do in the fire is entirely up to Him, but whatever happens, we can know there is another in the fire with us – we are never alone, and we can come to know His presence more.

To add to that, we should never doubt the goodness and the power and the purpose of God. We can be assured that God has a purpose for our fire. Maybe the purpose is to refine us, maybe the purpose is to liberate us from the bonds of doubt that bind us, or maybe the purpose is to reveal our true character – fire has a way of doing that – or unbeknownst to us, maybe there is something greater at stake which hangs in the balance – maybe it’s a person who watches our faithfulness as we walk in the fire, and that’s something to think about.

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