**Worship Wars**

**Text: Daniel 3:13-18**

13 *Then Nebuchadnezzar, in rage and fury, gave the command to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. So they brought these men before the king.*

14 *Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying to them, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the gold image which I have set up?*

15 *Now if you are ready at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, and you fall down and worship the image which I have made, good! But if you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?”*

16 *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.*

17 *If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king.*

18 *But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.”*

**Introduction**

In the summer of 1989, students in the Communist-led nation of China began actively protesting against their government, calling for democracy, free speech, and free press. Having had enough, the government demanded the protests stopped and began using force against their citizens to take back control. In fact, on June 4th, hundreds if not thousands of protesters were killed and over 10,000 arrested in what would later be known as the Tiananmen Square Massacre.

[BEGIN TANK MAN VIDEO] However, on June 5th, a day after the brutal killings, a powerful scene involving a fleet of tanks was caught on video. That video was later smuggled out of the country and played on news stations all around the world.

Stuart Franklin, who was on assignment for *Time* magazine, recounted the story this way, "At some point, shots were fired and the tanks carried on down the road toward us, leaving Tiananmen Square behind, until blocked by a lone protester." He wore a white shirt and black trousers, and he held two shopping bags in his hands. As the tanks came to a stop, the man gestured towards the tanks with one of the bags. In response, the lead tank attempted to drive around the man, but the man repeatedly stepped into the path of the tank in a show of nonviolent action. After repeatedly attempting to go around rather than crush the man, the lead tank stopped its engines, and the armored vehicles behind it seemed to follow suit. There was a short pause with the man and the tanks having reached a quiet, still impasse.”

[TANK MAN PICTURE] In April 1998, *Time* included the "Unknown Rebel," a reference to the fact that his identity has never been known, in a feature titled "Time 100: The Most Important People of the Century." In November 2016, *Time* included the photograph by Jeff Widener in "Time 100: The Most Influential Images of All Time."

Why? What was it about this man that drew the attention of people around the world?

I would argue, it was simply because of the perceived power of one man who never set out to be a hero—who never intended to be a figure celebrated around the world. Someone who never dreamed we would read about and study him decades later; a man not necessarily given to a position of external power but driven by an internal strength and resolve. A man who simply said, “I refuse to bow.”

**The War for Worship**

Long before there was a man who took on a fleet of tanks armed only with two shopping bags, there were three young men of Hebrew decent who were faced with a similar decision—to bow or not to bow.

When we consider the context of the Book of Daniel, we find the Jews have been taken into captivity by the Babylonians. According to Daniel 1, their King Nebuchadnezzar has instructed certain of the young men to be brought to Babylon.

4young men in whom *there was* no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who *had* ability to serve in the king’s palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans.

Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were three of these young men.

The king knew in order for him to be able to rule well, it meant that these Jews would have to be assimilated into the Babylonian culture. Everything about them would need to conform to Babylon’s way of life. Everything from their learning and language to their religion and worship.

This process began the moment they arrived when they instructed their Hebrew names be changed.

* Hananiah, “Yahweh is gracious”; Shadrach, “command of Aku (moon god)”
* Mishael, “who is what God is?”; Meshach, “who is what Aku is?”
* Azariah, “Yahweh will help”; Abednego, “servant of Nebo”

It is my opinion that this was an intentional effort to redirect the focus of these three away from Jehovah and onto the false gods of the Babylonians.

Nebuchadnezzar understood that if he could change the object of their worship, he could influence the way they would choose to live their life.

And so, as we pick up the text from our story, we find that Nebuchadnezzar had instructed a statue to be built that was 90ft x 9ft and issued a decree that anyone who did not bow when the music played would be executed by being thrown into a blazing hot furnace.

Oftentimes when I have seen this statue depicted, it has been in the likeness of Nebuchadnezzar as a monument to his achievements. In some ancient cultures the king was considered divine and so it would make sense to worship him as such. However, this was not the case in the Babylonian Empire. It is more likely that the image was in the likeness of one of Babylon’s gods, probably the principal god, Marduk.

Regardless of whose likeness it was in, it is with that in mind that we should make no mistake, when discussing the events of Dan. 3, it was about more than:

* just celebrating an incredible feat of craftsmanship;
* about more than just honoring a king or his accomplishments;
* about more than just showing they were subject to governmental rule.

This was deeper than that. At the heart of this story is a spiritual war being waged for their worship.

The command to bow before the statue was significant as bowing represented a sign of respect, of humility before, and submission to the one being honored. Bowing to this false god’s image—be it Nebuchadnezzar’s or some other deity—would have demonstrated worship to a god other than Jehovah.

Nebuchadnezzar knew what they worshiped had the power to control how they would live their life.

And, while we are thousands of years removed from this event and the battlefield looks different, I can promise you this ages-old war rages on as the enemy of our souls would love nothing more than to replace the object of our worship.

* Nothing more than to redirect our attention from Jesus Christ and onto the things of this world.
* To hijack our priorities that we might be distracted in misplaced worship that leads our families to focus on things that are temporal so that we fail to remember the eternal

Whether you realize it or not, you are engaged in warfare for your worship!

This morning, the question is not “will you worship,” but rather, who or what will be the object of your worship?

Why? Because worship influences every aspect of your life.

* What you worship influences what you believe
* What you worship influences what you do
* What you worship influences how you act
* Ultimately, worship will influence your eternity

I’ve come to remind you this morning not to be ignorant to the war that is being waged around you. There is still only one who is worthy of our worship.

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I think it is safe to say that it is likely no one here has an idol sitting in the corner of their bedroom that they bow before each day. However, idols are not limited to figurines of wood and clay.

Anything that stands between me and God is an idol.

When we choose to worship at the altar of idols, we begin to open ourselves up to be ruled by the very thing we worship.

The Altar of Entertainment

* Before long, I will begin taking my cues from what I’m being entertained by.
* Before long, my worldview begins to turn toward that of who I’m watching.
* Before long, I become desensitized to the ungodliness that’s being celebrated.
* Before long, my appetite for the things of God begins to give way as I get used to feasting on the entertainment in front of me.

I can’t sit through an hour-long service because I’m accustomed to being entertained by short videos from YouTube and social media.

Church is not to entertain but to engage.

The Altar of Popularity

* Before long, I begin being ruled by others’ opinions of me.
* I model my actions to meet the expectations of those I am trying to please.
* My decisions are not based on what is right or wrong, what is godly or ungodly. Instead they are based on what will get me the like, the attention, the status I’m desiring to have.

When all the while, our goal should never be to receive the applause of men but of the one with nail-scarred hands.

For others still, we are tempted to worship at the altars of relationships, addictions, sexual pleasure, money, success, achievement, family, etc. The point being if it takes the place of God, it is an idol and it is misplaced worship.

But in this war for our worship, God is looking for individuals and families who will not be distracted by the idols of this world and instead will stand flat-footed with their mind made up saying “I refuse to bow.” People who will wholeheartedly give themselves to Him.

* As for me and my house
* As for me and my family
* As for my life

I will give my worship to one and only one!

**Don’t Get Comfortable in Babylon**

It would have been easy for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to get comfortable in Babylon and forget this was not their home.

They could have had it real nice.

* Wearing the king’s clothes
* Eating from the king’s table
* Being offered positions in the palace

However, there is great danger in getting comfortable in Babylon. There is great danger getting comfortable in a place we don’t belong.

In our North American culture of independence, wealth, and prosperity, we fight this same battle. If we are not careful, it is our comfort that will become the enemy of our:

* Convictions
* Consecrations
* Commitments
* Calling

Decisions we make in altars like this one are replaced with comfortable living…

Comfort could have been their inheritance if they had just been willing to redirect their worship.

For Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, as word began to spread that construction was almost complete, I have to imagine these three teenagers had a few meetings on the subject of what they would do when the music started.

I wonder if there was some conversation about whether or not they should bow.

* Is it really that big of deal?
* Wouldn’t it just be easier to blend into the crowd?
* Surely God wouldn’t want us to lose our positions of power and influence by being branded an extremist?

Somewhere along the line, I have to believe these teens were reminded of something their parents used to do when they were young.

* The Shema: Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all they heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.
* Or of the first two commandments they were to follow:
  + Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
  + Thou shalt not make any graven images (statues, idols) to worship.

I know that long before they were faced with the temptation to bow, they had already settled some things in their heart.

16 *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.*

17 *If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king.*

18 *But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.”*

* What incredible faith – we know God is able, but even if he doesn’t, we’ve already made up our minds that we are not going to bow.

**CONCLUSION**

The story continues:

* The king is full of fury; his countenance changes toward the three boys
* He had his servants heat the furnace 7x hotter
* He commanded mighty men from his army to bind and cast them into the furnace
* The flames were so hot they killed the mighty men as the boys fell down into the fire

This decision to stand did not come without pressure and without heat…literally.

* When you decide to take a stand, it does not mean that there won’t be times of pressure from those who do not understand your worship.

But while Nebuchadnezzar thought he was punishing them for refusing to bow, he did not realize he was only setting the stage for them to prove why they wouldn’t in the first place.

*24 Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished; and he rose in haste and spoke, saying to his counselors, “Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?” They answered and said to the king, “True, O king.”*

*25 “Look!” he answered, “I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.”*

The presence of fire does not indicate the absence of God.

Whether they knew before or not, the three Hebrew boys understood after the fiery furnace that when they decided to stand for God, He was going to stand by them!

Not only them, but everyone on the outside was now witness to what was happening inside the furnace.

*26 Then Nebuchadnezzar went near the mouth of the burning fiery furnace and spoke, saying, “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here.” Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego came from the midst of the fire.*

*27 And the satraps, administrators, governors, and the king’s counselors gathered together, and they saw these men on whose bodies the fire had no power; the hair of their head was not singed nor were their garments affected, and the smell of fire was not on them.*

*28 Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, and they have frustrated the king’s word, and yielded their bodies, that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God!*

*29 Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation, or language which speaks anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made an ash heap; because there is no other God who can deliver like this.”*

* Don’t underestimate the power of one person’s worship.
* Your worship can change the atmosphere of your home, your job, your city, this church.

In the war for your worship, let me remind you that Jesus is the only one who is worthy of our praise. He is the only one worthy of our worship.

What I wish I had right now is one person who has felt like they have been in the middle of the fire, who would take a step out of the pew and would serve notice today: despite my circumstances, my worship remains the same.