

HOW TO BE BRAVE, DANIEL 3

Unshakable Faith #3

◆**Intro:** Right away I feel moved by the response of these three brave individuals to the Babylonian King (v16-18). It kinda makes your hair tingle, doesn't it? These verses are clearly the central piece of the text, even beyond the miraculous deliverance that comes later. These are the only words we hear out of the mouths of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. This is grade -A courage right here! Though they don't have power, yet they stand strong for what they believe. It's worth considering because power-brokers are pushing people around in our country today just like Nebuchadnezzar did in Babylon. Big Tech companies are censoring everyone they disagree with. Universities want to take back degrees from politicians who don't vote their way. I really should have called this message *Dealing with the Cancel Culture*. How do we deal with such persecution, that tries to force us to negate our faith? We can take in wisdom from Daniel.

◆**1. Make God your central focus for living and you can have courage even to death.** That is, if your own success in life is your aim, your sights are too low and your courage is insecure. Even though Neb is THE world power at the time, he's not secure as we see from the story. Because when I evaluate everything by ME, I have to push God (any greater power) out of the picture. That's what Neb is doing.

◆Whereas in chapter 2, Daniel asserts that God "sets up kings and deposes them.", in our chapter, no less that seven times we find a sharp contrast in the "image...Nebuchadnezzar has set

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up.” (v2,3,5,7,12,14,18). He’s countering God’s message to him from the dream in chapter 2, where a 4 part statue represented 4 kingdoms in history that would all disintegrate and be overtaken by a divine kingdom. Daniel’s interpretation of the dream said that the gold head of the statue represented Babylon, but the other parts represented three consecutively coming, lesser kingdoms. How does Neb respond? “We’ll just see about those so-called kingdoms!” he seems to be thinking to himself. “I’ll make a *whole* statue completely of gold. The whole thing will be about me!” Just look at what he says in v15 to the three friends: “*what god can save you from my hand?*” Oh, so now Neb sees himself as greater than the *gods!*

◆ Neb trusts in the idol of his own ability. Do you? You can see it when you push people into submission. In chapter one his official doesn’t want to experiment with Daniel’s food, lest his head be removed from his body by the king. In chapter two the king tells his advisers basically “Tell me my dream or.. I’ll chop you up in pieces.” In chapter 3 the king tells all his leaders and cabinet, “Bow to my statue or.. I’ll melt your faces off.” Even at the end of this episode, Neb’s declaration is, “Don’t slander the Hebrew’s god, or.. I’ll chop you up in pieces!” It’s a policy of cancel culture intimidation. (Neb is like our news media!)

◆ **A.** What do we learn in the megalomaniac King Nebuchadnezzar? How foolish to worship the idol of our own ability. How foolish we are to think that we determine our own

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future, or even that wanting to is a good focus in life. Why? Because there is a God who controls all things; whether not not fire burns, and whether or not you live! How foolish it is to madly amass our riches and our influence, thinking to insure ourselves for the future ease or security. “Ill sock it away” we think, “and then who or what can harm me?” But markets crash, money disappears over night. Wealth doesn’t make one courageous, rather it often fashions more nervous people. If Neb teaches us anything it is that we are not our own god we think we are. And self-sufficiency, trying to be your own god, doesn’t make you confident, in makes you paranoid. In this episode Neb is the shocked one. Neb is the troubled one. Neb is the one blubbering in anger at the courage of three powerless captives.

◆ Also, the more we think of ourselves as most important, the angrier we get with anything or anyone who gets in our way. Neb is a perfect example; he *loses* it at the thought that someone would dare stand up to him! His fear tactics aren’t working and that spells danger to his whole self-image. [Tell someone “I’m not the most important person in my life.”] But isn’t that our very nature as well? It’s happening in our politics everyday this year!

- ◆ Someone votes for the wrong candidate and gets fired.
- ◆ One party wants to actually “criminalize” the other party.
- ◆ A football coach prays on the field and loses his job.

◆ And how about personal levels?

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- ◆ Someone disagrees with you and you just can't stop arguing your case. Who are they to NOT think what you think? You better raise your voice and drown them out! Or write scathing things in the comments on their facebook page. (something Christians should strictly avoid.)
- ◆ Or someone says something nice to another, but not to us and we feel slighted, as though we are not important. And the hurt comes out as anger, or despair.
- ◆ Someone achieves a promotion, or a salary level, and it makes us bitter, especially since we certainly work harder than them. Therefore, we dislike them. Bow to MY image!
- ◆ Know what this tells us? As much as we say we live for God, in reality, we're living for the big ME. But this doesn't make a truly brave person. It make us insecure, vindictive, argumentative, and selfish, all the opposite things that God commands of us. We need to repent!
- ◆ **2.** Now what about the three Hebrew men? What does their calm courage tell you? **2. Those who place God front and center can face a furnace in peace because God is there with them.** Where did they most realize the real presence of God? In the fire!
- ◆ Doesn't their courage make you wonder "Would I die for my God?" Vibia Perpetua, a 22-year-old mother of an infant son, along with her servant girl who was eight months pregnant, was arrested for joining a class of Christian believers. Perpetua nursed

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her child in prison and made arrangements with her mother to take him if anything should happen. The servant girl gave birth to her child in prison.

◆ When Perpetua's father learned that she was to be thrown into the arena with wild beasts, he tried to get her out. But he was beaten instead. On the day of the execution the men were taken first. Among them was Saturus, the Bible class leader. He stopped at the gate for one last word of testimony with Pudens, the prison governor, who later turned to Christ and became a martyr himself. The men were sent into the arena with a bear, a leopard, and a wild boar. As Saturus was mangled by the beasts, the spectators shouted, "He is well baptized!"

◆ Next Perpetua and her servant were stripped and sent into the arena to face a "mad heifer." The torture soon became too much for the crowd and they cried, "Enough, enough!" The women were taken to the executioner. Perpetua called out to some grieving friends, "Give out the Word to the brothers and sisters; stand fast in the faith, love one another, and don't let our suffering become a stumbling block to you." The first blow of the gladiator was not sufficient. Perpetua cried out in pain, took the gladiator's hand, and directed the sword to her throat.

◆ Why was this young mother so courageous? Because her trust was in the true God, just like Daniel's friends. Their highest goal was to live for God no matter where they were, and look what kind of people they were. People of inalienable hope!

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◆ *"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you" (1 Pet 4:12-14)*

◆ Are you reviled or disregarded because you claim Jesus? It is an indication of his presence near you! (Justice Barret, "dogma lives loudly in you").

◆ **A.** But you see, Power, position and prosperity were not the point for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. (Oh these were the point for everyone else in the story: the King, the jealous satraps, and advisors.) These men were not brave because they had power or position, but because they had the presence of God.

They had no guarantee God was going to rescue them from the flames. There's no record of God ever doing that before! It didn't really matter to them if God did or didn't. Why? Because they fully trusted that the God of life could and would do what was best. They lived for something more than this life. Just look at what they say to the King!

◆ v16 *We do not need to answer you in this matter (ASV).* They literally informed the king, "we don't answer to you!" (Can't you hear Neb? "Did you just say that to me

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right now?! Did you just say what I think I heard you say up in here?”)

◆v18 *even if he does not ... we will not serve your gods.*

They knew the Ten Commandments. Command number one: “you must not have any other gods besides me.” They knew their nation was in Babylon for breaking this command!! (Probably just like USA Today.)

◆**B.** Who are you living for, ...really? Perhaps we would do well to evaluate how important power, position, and prosperity is to us. Do we take a job based first on our pay? Do we perform less when we think we’re under paid? Do we fail to speak up based first on whether we might lose a position or a contract? Do we serve somewhere because it makes us feel important? Do we feel bad when we feel unimportant? Is our comfortable life of holiday vacations, and brand new vehicles more important to us than stopping injustice or calling out the irrationality of politically correct foolishness? I bring this up because conservative people, and Christians in particular, are experiencing the cancel culture right now in America. It will only get worse. It’s already worse for Christians on the African continent. There it’s come down to actual life and death. Here...

◆Facebook removes your posts if they don’t fit their politics. I’ve had it done, and so have some of you.

◆Last week Twitter locked LifeSiteNews, Daily Citizen, and numerous others out of their accounts on the platform for

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displaying a message noting that President Joe Biden's newly named Assistant Secretary of Health, "Rachel" Levine is actually a man pretending he's a woman. It's a troubling paradox of having a person who denies the basic science of the human anatomy be in an authoritative position in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

◆ That's just one of many examples.

◆ Last week stores like Bed, Bath, and Beyond, Kohl's, HEB, Wayfair, and others abruptly decided to cut ties with the MyPillow brand because of Mike Lindell's (founder) political choices. He said "We've been down this road before. When I spoke out in the Rose Garden [about bringing] God back into our schools and reading our Bible, I was attacked then too." Thankfully he is not deterred. He said, "God's got his hand in all this. I put 100 percent of my faith in the Lord." (Makes me want to buy a MyPillow whether I need one or not.)

◆ **C.** What we see in the fiery furnace is great conviction, dedication, and faith in the one true God. And that makes them courageous! It's impressive. Perhaps you sometimes wonder, "Do I have the courage to die for Jesus?" Be careful before you answer. John Piper writes:

◆ "A true Christian must be willing to say, "I will not renounce Christ, even if it costs my life." But as soon as we say that, it makes a whole lot of things in our lives look ridiculous. I will die for you, but I can't find time to sit and read your teaching each day. I will die for you, but prayer doesn't seem real. I will die for

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you, but I can't talk to Jim about you at work. I will die for you, but I can't support your cause with more than 10% of my income. One of the best ways to bring wonderful Christ-honoring changes into your life is to measure your way of life by your willingness to die for Jesus."

◆**Conclusion:** Bear in mind that Daniel is writing to his fellow Jews in exile in Babylon, a place that scripture refers to as "the furnace of adversity." They are in the furnace right then! But they can courageously trust God nonetheless. So can you. Why? Because God is able, and God is good, which means that his rule will turn out in the end NO MATTER WHAT. The Heidelberg Catechism puts it this way:

26 Q. What do you believe when you say,
"I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth"?

A. That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who out of nothing created heaven and earth
and everything in them,
who still upholds and rules them
by his eternal counsel and providence,
is my God and Father
because of Christ his Son.

I trust him so much that I do not doubt
he will provide
whatever I need
for body and soul,
and he will turn to my good
whatever adversity he sends me
in this sad world.

He is able to do this because he is almighty God;
he desires to do this because he is a faithful Father.

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◆ Be brave followers of Jesus. Your God is able. And your God is present with you. “While Israel was in exile, God sent his angel/Son to deliver Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from Nebuchadnezzar’s fiery furnace. In the fullness of time, God sent his only Son to save his people from the furnace of hell. Jesus said that at the end of time, “the Son of Man (Daniel’s term!) will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matt 13:42–43). -Sidney Greidanus.