



I recall when I was a child, watching certain movies or shows, and I'd want to be the characters. Whether I was watching Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, hoping I'd mutate into one of them or even watching Bruce Lee and then trying to conjure up ninja powers; I wanted to relate to the heroes of the stories. I know this isn't just me. You can look at little girls and boys – even today – and you'll see them wearing spiderman costumes or princess dresses. They don't only wear them for dress-up, but they'll wear it to the store. We have an innate longing to be associated with the heroes.

I think we have this longing because this is how God created us. Jesus himself picks up on this idea in Matthew 5. When saying that his followers are blessed when persecuted, he adds: **Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**<sup>1</sup> Jesus brings up an association we have as Christians. We are followers like the prophets were followers of God. When you read about Isaiah or Jeremiah or Elijah, you should feel a kinship with them. Like a child relates to heroes in a story, Christians should relate to the prophets because in this new covenant era, we are given a call to be like the prophets – in calling people to know God, turn to God and to trust Jesus. This is our association, according to Jesus. The prophets who were persecuted. The prophets who weren't vindicated in their lifetimes, but have been solidified in the Scriptures. The prophets who are now worshipping the Lord as part of the great cloud of witnesses in Heaven. The prophets who will hear "well done, good and faithful servant." These are the ones we are like. But we also have a difference from the prophets. Or, maybe I should say, we aren't to be like *all* the prophets in *every* way. Instead, the New Testament goes on to teach us that we are to behave like the exiles. This is why we're in Daniel. Daniel is a prophet, and he is in exile! As we try to navigate through how to act and behave in our society – a society that I wouldn't be surprised if Christians are actively persecuted and suffer within my lifetime – we need to see how the Scriptures call us as Christians to live as exiles in this world. So, the last two weeks, you've heard wonderful messages from both Jonathan and David. They've emphasized a radical obedience and humility that doesn't come naturally to us. This type of obedience comes from God as he shapes our hearts to love him. This obedience comes when God causes our hearts and minds to be enraptured with making God's glory and God's Kingdom known. This longing for God and for his Kingdom leads us to live increasingly as exiles in this world. Truly, this world is not our home. And, I think we see this over and over again in the stories of Daniel.

Now, today we're entering chapter 3 of Daniel, and I've entitled the sermon "Faithful Defiance." This is an oxymoron. How can you defy and be faithful? Well, that's what we're going to discover today. And the main idea of the sermon is this: **Exiles (i.e. – Christians) must faithfully defy leaders when commanded to worship the "gods" of this world.** We're going to unpack what this means as we work through this very familiar story. But before we do this, we need to understand the backdrop of the story.

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<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 5:12.

## **The Backdrop**

At the end of chapter 2, after Daniel is elevated by Nebuchadnezzar for stating and interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream, we're told that Daniel made a request for Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to be appointed over the affairs of Babylon, and Nebuchadnezzar granted the request. This leads us into chapter 3. These three men are in high leadership in Babylon, and this personally shocks me. The reason it shocks me is because, from a Scriptural perspective, Babylon is the kingdom of the anti-Christ. Read Revelation. Babylon is to be destroyed. Yet, these three God-honoring men are working at such high levels within the heart of Babylon. I want to make something explicit here. Just because the world doesn't love God. Just because a government doesn't seek the Lord's glory, doesn't mean we don't care about the society. It also doesn't mean that the work within a government is meaningless. Again, as I quoted weeks ago, God, speaking through Jeremiah stated to Israel that they were to **“. . . seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”**<sup>2</sup> Why not have Israel fight against Babylon? Or, put it today, “Why wouldn't God have us usurp and topple our sinful society?” Well, as Mark Buhl preached a few weeks ago, we are *salt* and *light*. Jesus tells us that we are to be in the world, while not being of it. And, as ambassadors for Jesus, as exiles in this world, we are to shine forth the call of God's grace – praying people would repent and turn to him.

What we will see in chapter 3 is exactly that from these three men. Here they are ruling in Babylon and through faithful defiance, they don't live to emphasize themselves. They live to make God's glory and grace known. How do they do this? Well, the author gives more backdrop. In verses 1-3, we read that Nebuchadnezzar built a golden idol sixty cubits high and six cubits wide. Which is about 90 feet high. Then, what's interesting in this chapter is that we're told *twice* the people who showed up: 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.<sup>3</sup> They all listened to Nebuchadnezzar. Listen, Nebuchadnezzar was not a great guy. Things he did for fun, I cannot recite here. People wouldn't want to be on his bad side. Even in this story, you find out how evil Nebuchadnezzar is. As the story goes on, we read this in verses 4-7: <sup>4</sup>And the herald proclaimed aloud, “You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, <sup>5</sup>that 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. <sup>6</sup>And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace.” <sup>7</sup>Therefore, 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.<sup>4</sup> At this point, I want to give a principle for us to understand as exiles in this world:

### **1. The world yearns to worship (vv. 4-7).**

Again, we have a repeat in these verses. This time, it's a repeat on instrumental worship. All instruments are coming together to praise this idol. Not only all instruments, but we've already heard that there's a large number and variation of people and rulers who have come to worship. Then we hear the herald's statement. He describes the group as “peoples, nations, and languages.” This is oddly familiar to when the New Testament speaks of a day when Jesus returns and he will gather people from every tribe, nation, and tongue. Do you see how Babylon is the anti-God's Kingdom? Then there's also a penalty for

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<sup>2</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Je 29:7.

<sup>3</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Da 3:2.

<sup>4</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Da 3:4–7.

not worshipping the god. Where the Scriptures teach us that human beings are born guilty of sin and are condemned to Hell. Nebuchadnezzar has his own form of hell – the fiery furnace.

Now, we can look at this and think, “Well, I’m so glad that humans have become so much more refined. We don’t act that way anymore here in the West.” Maybe we don’t built large altars, but we still have gods that we worship. By that, I mean that we have things in our lives that we value supremely – valuing more than God. Those are things we worship. Listen, the word “worship” has the root word for “worth.” What you ascribe ultimate worth to, you worship. I think we can see in our nation that people can put ultimate worship in sexuality. And, if you disagree with them, you can be shamed or guilted. Others put ultimate worth in their financial status, and if you confront that, they might mock and put you down. Others can put ultimate worth in government or a political party – and if you emphasize the Kingdom of Jesus as opposed to blind allegiance to a party, you can be put down as well and made to feel guilty of a crime.

Please take heed to Daniel 3. Every human worships. **The question is *what you worship*. And, will what you worship really set you free and give you what you were ultimately created for?** If you are a follower of Jesus, then you worship God. But what does that look like if the world is trying to conform you to its mold? What if a friend, family member, society, or government forces you to give allegiance to a mere created thing? This leads to the second point.

## **2. Christians must faithfully defy false worship (vv. 8-23).**

The music blasts and everyone bows down to worship the statue. The gathering must have been huge because it seems Nebuchadnezzar misses that three men didn’t bow down. So, some other individuals come to let Nebuchadnezzar know of this defiance. The men who were appointed over the province of Babylon – Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego – didn’t bow down to worship the idol! They didn’t adhere to Nebuchadnezzar’s command! Look at verses 13-16 with me: <sup>13</sup> Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king. <sup>14</sup> 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? <sup>15</sup> 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?”<sup>5</sup>

Furious rage. Nebuchadnezzar is overflowing with anger. But even in his anger, he gives these men a second chance – which might be saying something of the value of these men to the kingdom of Babylon. But here were individuals who were taken from Israel to Babylon. They were indoctrinated in the public school of Babylon so that they would be ambassadors and rulers for Babylon. As a part of the indoctrination, he’s even changed their names to adhere with the gods of Babylon. Shadrach was Hananiah. Hananiah means “God has been gracious.” Shadrach means “command of Aku,” who was the moon god. Meshach was Mishael. Mishael means “who is what God is,” and Meshach was probably the name of a Chaldean god. Azariah was Abednego. Azariah means “God has helped,” and Abednego means “slave of the god Nebo.” Nebuchadnezzar has done everything to indoctrinate and brainwash these boys. But giving them new names cannot change who they really are. I hope you hear this, Ventura. No matter what the world says about you. No matter what people say about you to mock you

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<sup>5</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Da 3:13–15.

or put you down. No matter what names people might say about us in order to keep us from worshipping God, it's not true! If you are a follower of Christ, you are a follower of Christ. Those other names don't define you. Jesus does!

Now, with these three boys, I'm sure Nebuchadnezzar thinks he's given them the life. They're rulers in Babylon (even though they're exiles). He's fed them and clothed them, and this is the thanks he gets? It's like they're spitting in his face. But he gives them a second chance. He restates that they are to do this with all the musical instrumentation, and he expresses that if they do, fine. If they don't, they'll be thrown into the fiery furnace. By the way, terms like fire are emphasized many times in this chapter. Keep that in mind as we move ahead. But here is the threat. Fire. Death. If they do not worship Nebuchadnezzar's god, they face torture. How does that sound?

Let's look at the response of boys. First, focus on their defiance. A New Testament example of this kind of defiance is when Peter speaks back to the religious leaders in Jerusalem and states that we must obey God rather than man. When there's only two options, you must obey God. This is a defiance of *lesser* authorities because you recognize the *greater* authority, who is God himself. But I think Christians can be tempted to only focus on the idea of defiance, and I think may then too quickly say that the world is forcing them to worship their gods. Think again. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, went to Nebuchadnezzar's training. They ruled in the Babylonian kingdom and Nebuchadnezzar's court. While there was much wickedness in these circles, they weren't embracing false worship. They were "in" but not "of." Keep that in mind in our society, too. The government can require a lot – and a lot they require can be wrong. But we are still called to honor the rulers so that the rulers see there is a greater King. If you doubt what I'm saying here, look at the boys' faithful response.

Second, focus on their faithfulness. When we say "faithful," who are they faithful, too? The answer is *faithful to God*. But there is an element where they are also seeking to be as faithful as possible to Nebuchadnezzar. Do you notice that they show up to this whole thing. But they aren't yelling and screaming, "NO! We won't do this!" And, once Nebuchadnezzar tells them he's going to have them killed if they don't bow down, they don't defend themselves and talk about all their contributions to the Babylonian society. Nope. Their faithfulness looks like *quiet dissent*. But their response also looks like *fearless defense* of God. You see, I think in history we can see Christians thinking they're elevating God in the midst of persecution, but in reality, they are elevating themselves. My rights. My privileges. My views. My value. Let me give a different example. Imagine someone kidnapped my wife, and I'm on the phone trying to get her back. I then say something like, "Listen, you can't treat me this way. My wife thinks I'm awesome and valuable, and she wouldn't want you to take her from my life. I also can't do practical life without her, so I need you to set her free. She loves serving me and making much of me – and without her, I won't experience those types of comforts." Who am I elevating? Me, right?

Sadly, it seems like many Christians in our day have seemed to argue this way. They eclipse God's glory in deference to themselves. "You can't treat me this way because God values me and loves me so much. God wouldn't want you to do this to me. He makes much of me and therefore you're wrong in doing what you're doing to me." Listen, it's true that God loves his children. It's true that in due time God raises up his children! This is true. BUT, if you glory in God's glory, then you want to make much of him – not much of you. He's the all-glorious one that you need – and he's the all-glorious one that the world needs! Whether Presidents, Governors, Majors, City Councils. People need the Jesus we know! Will we show them the Savior?

Look at Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah's response to Nebuchadnezzar in verse 16: "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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." <sup>6</sup> They essentially say that they don't need to argue, but they simply want to make clear that they trust God whether they live or die. They also trust God has all power. They make God the centerpiece of their speech. Isn't that spectacular?! This is what Ambassadors and Exiles do! But this doesn't mean the world will like it. Nebuchadnezzar's anger increases. The heat of the furnace is over 7 times more. It's so hot that when the boys are escorted to the fire, the flame from the fire killed the men who threw the boys in. At this point, I want to move to the final point:

### 3. God will make himself known (vv. 26-27).

I must add that he will make himself known in his timing. God doesn't save every person from a literal fiery furnace. There are people who have been martyred. But, in God's timing, he will make his justice and mercy known. His glory will be on display for *all* to see. The boys trusted God would do this. And God's glory was their permeating desire. Their desire wasn't simply self-preservation. Their desire wasn't simply that Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon would become more moral. That's nice, but their desire was that God would be known.

And God made himself known. Nebuchadnezzar asks again how many people they put in the furnace. He wonders because he sees someone who looks like a son of the gods (or, the Son of God). Either way, this is the preincarnate Jesus or a rescuing angel. Either way, this is a miracle. Move into and look at verses 26-27 now: <sup>26</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup>

People from every nation, language, and people saw this. The ruler of the most powerful nation in the world saw this. The gargantuan idol couldn't not hold them. The fire could not consume them. Why? Because The One, True God over all nations, languages and people had decreed this. The Ruler over the Cosmos came to them. The God who saves rescued them. How amazing is God's power and grace. This reminds me of words from Isaiah 43. Read them on the screen behind me, with me: **when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. . . . Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you. . . .**<sup>8</sup>

Do you hear this, Christian? Because you are precious and honored, and God *loves* you. God doesn't promise no flames. God doesn't promise no trials or persecution. In the New Testament, we're told to not be surprised by the fiery trials! Interesting phrase, right? I can only imagine Peter, as he writes from Rome and hears the cheers in the colosseum is remembering Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Don't be shocked! God cares for you as much as he loves these three boys! He promises that he loves you and you are precious to him. Let that truth and reality sink in! If you *know* he loves you, by his grace, you can

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<sup>6</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Da 3:16–18.

<sup>7</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Da 3:26–27.

<sup>8</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Is 43:2–4.

persevere and magnify his glory over yours! And where do we see his love most clearly? In Jesus himself. Jesus actually fulfills the faithful defiance of Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. The apostle Peter, who brings up the themes of exile, also speaks of Jesus' tongue being quiet in his dissent. When accused, he didn't answer back. We look to Jesus and see that he came to magnify the Triune God's glory – not simply his own. Jesus endured not simply earthly fire, but he endured the wrath of God for sinners, in their place, so they could be forgiven and reconciled to God. And, Jesus welcomes anyone who turns to him. And, I mean *anyone*. Even in this story, I'm amazed that we have a God who rescues three of his own. But do you realize, in this book of Daniel, God is reaching Babylonians – and he's calling Nebuchadnezzar to himself?

God cares for the Nebuchadnezzars and the oppressed – and everyone in between. Of course, Nebuchadnezzar responds by ordering all to worship God, but this is a sign that he's still not repentant. Just like he ordered people, by death, to worship the idol. He orders people to worship God. The point is that he's still in control. And, God will work to humble Nebuchadnezzar more. But I want you to see God's patience. And, if you're here today thinking your sin is too great. Or, if you're thinking you're a Nebuchadnezzar. There's forgiveness for you. Or, maybe you think you're more like the boys, but you're angry towards the governing authorities and you don't care for their souls – check your spirit. Jesus came to save sinners – of whom we all are! Have you been rescued by grace? Then seek for others to know this grace as well!

Now, we come to some final concluding application questions:

- 1. Do you lean towards defiance or faithfulness instead of being faithfully defiant?** Some can just not want to rock the boat and defend that as faithfulness. But are you being faithful to God or to self? Others lean to defiance, without faithfulness to God and honoring authorities. But this doesn't magnify God. This magnifies self as well. Where are you? How do you need to repent?
- 2. Do you want God and his character to be known, entrusting yourself to him?** I have found for myself that when I'm not meditating on God and his character, I lose trust in him. I think he's wrong or not acting as he ought. I judge him. When was the last time you spent meditating on and communing with the Lord? Do you *know* him? And if you think you know him, but you don't *know* him, maybe you need to devote more specific time to this.
- 3. What leaders might you hate or mock?** The Scriptures don't simply call us to not be mockers, but calls us to be salt and light. What does repentance look like for you?

All-in-all, **Exiles (i.e. – Christians) must faithfully defy leaders when commanded to worship the “gods” of this world – living in such a way that God is known and magnified to the world around us.**