

Turning Up The Heat

Daniel 3

Series: Unshakable | A Study in the Book of Daniel

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This past summer, our family took a trip across the pond to spend a week in the UK. It was kind of a last hurrah with Riley going off to college, and we had a great time doing the touristy thing...took in some shows...ate some good food. We had a blast!

Part of what made the trip a possibility is that I was scheduled to be over there with Dallas Baptist University. Each year they take a group of Ph.D. students to Oxford for a week to study principles of incarnational leadership.

One of the places DBU takes their group and I made sure to point out to our family while in Oxford was what is known as Martyr's Monument (**SHOW PIC**)

This is a monument erected in the middle of the city of Oxford – right as you are getting into the mix of colleges and businesses that make up the city square. It's there to honor the lives of those known as the "Oxford Martyrs".

Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley, and Thomas Cranmer were reformers working to purify the Church of England. The inscription at the bottom of the monument reads as follows:

"To the Glory of God, and in grateful commemoration of His servants, Thomas Cranmer, Nicholas Ridley, Hugh Latimer, Prelates of the Church of England, who near this spot yielded their bodies to be burned, bearing witness to the sacred truths which they had affirmed and maintained against the errors of the Church of Rome, and rejoicing that to them it was given not only to believe in Christ, but also to suffer for His sake..."

There is actually an "X" that is marked in the street – it's an "X" marks the spot where these three reformers were burned at the stake for the stances they took regarding Christ and various doctrines of the Church. (**SHOW PIC**)

The story of Latimer and Ridley's execution is one that is well-documented and inspiring to say the least.

They were burned at the stake together and it was said that before Latimer died, he could be heard encouraging Ridley, "Be of good comfort, Mr. Ridley, and play the man! We shall this day light such a candle by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out."

Amazing, isn't it? That facing death - for doing and believing the right things, mind you...these men stood strong. They kept their faith even while flames consumed them!

It reminds me of the story we are looking at today in Daniel 3. I'm calling the message: **Turning Up The Heat**

I told my friend and long-time preacher this week, Ed Etheridge that if a preacher can't preach Daniel 3, they ought to just get out of the ministry!

This is a passage of scripture that is VERY familiar to those that have grown up in the church. It's one of those stories that are told when we are youngsters that grab our attention and causes our imagination to run wild.

It's the story of Daniel's three friends – Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and the fourth man in the fiery furnace. If you don't know this story, just get ready because this is one that will leave you fired up – see what I did there?!

Let's get into our text. To catch those of you up on where we are, Daniel, in chapter two, interpreted a dream for the evil King Nebuchadnezzar that no one else in all of the land could interpret.

Because of this, Nebo (that's what we're calling him for short) makes Daniel the ruler over the entire province of Babylon AND gives him authority over all wisemen and enchanters and magicians, and astrologers – essentially makes him the Headmaster for the University of Babylon.

And look at how Daniel 2 concludes: **Daniel 2:49 – “Daniel made a request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon. But Daniel remained at the king's court.”**

Now, most scholars will mark the turning of the page (from chapter 2 to chapter 3) as representing somewhere between 15-20 years.

So, this is just an estimate – there's NO WAY we could know this for sure, but if Daniel and his friends were exiled at or around 15 years of age, they are probably in his late 20's, early 30's when this scene were about to read is going down.

Daniel and his friends are in leadership in the country...they are influencers...they are in positions of prestige and power.

Daniel 3:1 – “King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.”

Now, this is interesting here especially on the heels of what happened in chapter two. If you missed last week, go back and listen to it. Part of Nebo's dream that he had was this large image he was seeing...and Daniel interprets that image as four distinct kingdoms to come starting with the head of gold (which represented Nebo and Babylon).

The interpretation of the dream was that kingdom is going to go away and there will be another kingdom, and then another kingdom, and then another kingdom to come, finally an everlasting kingdom will be put in place that will be stronger and more enduring than all the other kingdoms.

We noted that Nebo probably liked that image of gold and we don't know if it played into the construction of this image, but here it is years later and he has constructed a HUGE image... a HUGE statue – it's 90 feet high and 9 feet wide.

Just for a comparison...and we don't know what this image was...was it a statue of a god the Babylonians served...was it a statue of Nebo himself...was it more like an obelisk, kind of like the Washington monument.

Illus. India – I remember waking up the next morning and walking down the street from my hotel and seeing this (**SHOW PIC**) –that's 108 ft. tall just for comparisons sake!

You don't have to travel to India to see an image like this though, you can just drive down to Sugar Land at the Hindu Temple there and see this statue (**SHOW PIC**) – it's actually 90 ft tall as well – the exact height of Nebo's statue.

Again, we don't know exactly what this image looked like or represented, what we do know is that for the groundbreaking ceremony and dedication of the image being constructed, Nebo expected a lot of people to show up – especially those in power AND he wanted them to bow before this image...this statue.

Daniel 3:2-7 – “Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather 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. (just an interesting side note here...in hermeneutics, which is the study of the Bible, we are taught to look for words of repetition. In this passage the words “set up” is recorded 7x, “fiery furnace” 8x, “image” 10x, “worship” 11x – there seems to be an emphasis here that Daniel wants us to make special note of) ³Then the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. ⁴And the herald proclaimed aloud, “You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, ⁵that 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. ⁶And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace.” ⁷Therefore, 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.”

There's a lot going on in this passage. Talk about pressure to bow down and conform...we talked about conform and compromise being the goal of Babylon in week two. If you were here and remember, we said that whenever you see the word, “Babylon” you should put in parenthesis this description out beside it:

Babylon (lust for power, selfish autonomy, human greed, rampant idolatry, unbridled hedonism)

This is what Babylon is AND this is what Babylon represents...AND this is where we are living!

Now, there are two MAJOR temptations that come with living in Babylon. We'll look at both as we make our way through this text. The first temptation we are confronted with is:

1. The temptation to give in

Babylon wants you to bow down and worship something or someone other than God! Put our definition of Babylon on the screen again:

Babylon (lust for power, selfish autonomy, human greed, rampant idolatry, unbridled hedonism)

Babylon pressures you to:

- Bow down to power and if you have to cut corners to gain it or attain more of it, then so be it!
- Bow down to self...in Babylon the world revolves around you! No one gets to tell me how I live my life!
- Bow down to the god of "more" – accumulate and hoard...after-all, if you are not looking out for you, who will!
- Bow down to idols...you say, "I'm glad I don't do that...glad here in America we don't have statues and big images that we are forced to bow down to!"

We may not have statues and images that we pull over on the side of the road and bow down to like in India or like we see here in Daniel chapter three, but let me assure you, we have more than our fair share of idols here in the United States.

Tim Keller in his book, *Counterfeit Gods* writes: **"What is an idol? It is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you see to give you what only God can give...An idol is what you look at and say, in your heart of hearts, "If I have that, then I'll feel my life has meaning, then I'll know I have value, then I'll feel significant and secure."...If anything becomes more fundamental than God to your happiness, meaning in life, and identity, then it is an idol."**

Make no mistake...just because we don't have 90 ft high statues, doesn't mean we don't have idols! We are tempted in Babylon to bow down to in a million different ways.

And it's not just Babylon – it's our own hearts! I believe it was the reformer, John Calvin that referred to our hearts as a "perpetual idol making factory"...this is part of our fallen nature, our heart yearns to worship and bow down to anything other than the one, true God. And Babylon is happy to feed this in us.

Let me quote Keller one more time:

Tim Keller – “A counterfeit god is anything so central and essential to your life that, should you lose it, your life would feel hardly worth living. An idol has such a controlling position in your heart that you can spend most of your passion and energy, your emotional and financial resources, on it without a second thought. It can be family and children, or career and making money, or achievement and critical acclaim, or saving “face” and social standing. It can be romantic relationship, peer approval, competence and skill, secure and comfortable circumstances, your beauty or your brains, a great political or social cause, your morality and virtue, or even success in Christian ministry.”

Babylon’s main temptation is to get you to give in – i.e. worship and bow down to something or someone other than God. And the pressure to do so is almost overwhelming.

Note some of the internal and external pressure that is going on in this text as it relates to this temptation to get people to worship and pay homage to Nebo and this statue he has set up!

- You’ve got the king’s edict to deal with...and remember what a nutjob he really is...
- You’ve got everyone who is anyone bowing down to this statue and doing directly as they are told – so there is an element of peer pressure in this...
- You’ve got music accompanying this call to bow down – that’s pretty weighty. Just imagine NOT standing up when the National Anthem is played or think about visiting the President and NOT standing when *Hail to the Chief* begins to play. There is something deeply emotional and emotive as it relates to music and power...
- On top of all of this, add the threat of a fiery furnace if you don’t (v. 6) “fall down and worship immediately”...

I mean this is Babylon through and through. The pressure to conform and bow down and just give in is SO intense! And now, you have Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel’s not mentioned in this text) standing strong and being faithful in this.

So far, they have refused to give in and bow down, but then they get tattled on!

Daniel 3:8 – “Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews.”

That description there, “maliciously accused” is more literally translated, “they ate their pieces” – meaning these other wisemen – the ones that didn’t get promoted...the ones that that got previously passed by were so jealous of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that they were looking for an opportunity to expose them and as soon as it presented itself, they chewed them up and spit them out. As one commentary put it, “they sank their teeth into them!”

This is what jealousy and insecurity and does! And fair warning: when we live for God and shine like lights in darkness, most people in the world won't like it!

Standing by our convictions, convicts them...and if able like these wise men:

- They will look to discredit...
- They will look to slander...
- They will look to silence us...

And this is what we see taking place here. Look at the text:

Daniel 3:9-12 – “They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, “O king, live forever! ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace. ¹² There are certain Jews whom you have appointed (subtle dig here... these are “your guys”, King Nebo) over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, pay no attention to you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

Add to that list of pressures the wrath of a crazy king!

Daniel 3:13-15 – “Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king. ¹⁴ 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? 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?”

Nebo gives them a second chance...we don't know why because he doesn't seem to be that merciful of a man. Maybe he favored them a bit because of their relationship with Daniel. Maybe this was a big show so that Nebo was putting on – kind of bullying them with his power – the thought is, “when I wasn't present, they didn't bow, I bet they will when I bring them in to stand before me.”

Now, to me...this is where the courage of these men really impresses me because I know myself well enough that if I was put in the same situation as these men, here's the internal conversation that I'd be having:

“Okay, God has put me in this position of prominence, certainly he doesn't want me to lose it...I'm doing good here, so I'll bow down on the outside, but God knows I'm not bowing on the inside. PLUS, maybe this is God giving me a second chance to recant. He wants me here, so I'll reluctantly bow, but God knows my heart...bowing down is just a part of being in Babylon. I'll do it, but God knows my loyalty is to him and him alone.”

This is the justification I fear I would be making in this moment. I'd love to sit here and say, "I'd be standing with these guys...if I was there it'd read, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and Jarrett".

But the truth is, when called into the most powerful and most dangerous man on the planet who is (v. 13) in a "furious rage"...I don't know if I would have the courage these guys have.

And let me here just introduce the second major temptation that comes our way when living in Babylon. The first temptation is to give in...to bow down...it's an issue of worship.

The second major temptation is:

2. The temptation to give up

It's the temptation to throw in the towel and quit. My fear is not just that I would justify WHY I could bow down and get out of there with my life, I also fear that by this point in time, I'd be pretty discouraged, and I fear that I would kind of give up on God.

I read this and wonder, "Goodness, where does this faith these guys have come from?" It's amazing.

- They are exiled as teenagers and taken to a foreign land...
- They are totally indoctrinated in the culture and reeducated – i.e. brainwashed to think and act like a Babylonian...
- They are given new names...their Hebrew names given in honor of their God no longer appreciated or used...
- As mentioned in previous weeks, they are serving in the king's court, under the leadership of the chief eunuch which means that it's highly likely that they were castrated when they got to Babylon...so their identity has been taken away from them...
- Who knows how many times this loose cannon of a king has tried to kill them for sleeping on the wrong side of the bed...I'm sure they have walk on eggshells because they don't want to step on an imaginary landmine that sends the king over the edge...

Now, they are confronted with a fiery furnace for staying true to their God, and I just have to think a major temptation they dealt with was discouragement!

"God, we're doing everything right, and now this? What is going on? Do you NOT see? Do you NOT care? We're trying to stand strong and do the right thing, but all it's doing is getting us in trouble! We've got guys lying about us...throwing us under the bus and all we're trying to do is please you. This isn't fair, God."

And the temptation while in Babylon is discouragement and disappointment. We don't play by Babylon's rules, but it's the world that we are living in, and:

- it can be harsh...
- it can hang you out to dry...
- it can put you on your back...

And if you are not careful, you will be tempted to throw in the towel and quit.

What impresses me about these men is that they don't fall to the temptation to give in OR give up. Look at their response to the king. They stay faithful to their God.

Daniel 3:16-18 - "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ 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."

These men were resolved...men of courage and conviction. They drew the line and were not going to worship anything or anyone other than their God.

We saw this earlier in chapter one with the issue of the food. They were not going to eat the food from the king's table. Both of these issues are what I would call WORSHIP issues...this is where they drew the line.

They knew it was against the law of their God – it's the first two commandments:

Exodus 20:3-6 – "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love and keep my commandments."

I'm thinking these verses were memorized in their heads and written on their hearts – AND by the way THIS is how you stand strong against the temptations of Babylon.

You battle the temptation to give in (i.e bow down) and give up with your head AND your heart.

Look at the two temptations...I'll put them on the screen together:

- 1. The temptation to give in**
- 2. The temptation to give up**

If you're taking notes, I want you to write a word out beside each of these statements – THIS is how you stay true in Babylon. This is how you stay faithful when the heat is being turned up!

Beside the first statement, write this word: "Heart"

1. The temptation to give in – HEART

Beside the second statement, write this word: “Head”

2. The temptation to give up – HEAD

Giving in...bowing down is an issue of the heart. It's a worship issue. Babylon wants your affections...wants you wrapped up in your passions...it wants you to fashion idols of all sizes so that you bow down to anything and/or anyone other than God.

The only way you battle this is by your heart being totally and completely the Lord's. It requires constant attention...it requires that we constantly pull the weeds of Babylon out of it and cultivate a tenderness that is sensitive to Christ and his Kingdom.

Go back and listen to previous messages: Along with God's Spirit that comes at salvation, you need the Bible and biblical community to help strengthen your heart so that you can say, “I'm NOT bowing down.”

Giving up...throwing in the towel in quitting is a battle you fight with your head. If statement one is an issue of the worship, statement two is an issue of trust.

Babylon is going to constantly tell you that you can't trust God! Babylon is going to tell you that God doesn't exist! That he's not worth following...that your faith is futile and it isn't/doesn't pay off! That God doesn't really love you, why else would you be facing a fiery furnace for living for him?

If we are going to defeat the temptation to give up, it must be with our minds! Our head has to be on straight. We must be thinking right which is hard to do in Babylon when we are bombarded with Babylonian ideas and submersed in Babylon culture.

If we are going to stay true to God when tough times come...when we're threatened with fiery furnaces because of what we believe...the only way this happens is by:

- “taking our thoughts captive” (2 Cor. 10:5)
- “putting on the helmet of salvation” (Eph. 6:17)
- “preparing our minds for action” (1 Peter 1:13)
- ensuring “our mind is put on the Spirit” (Rom. 8:6)

We battle the temptation to not give up or give in with our heart and with our head. What we are seeing in Daniel three is a matter of worship and trust – that's the question at hand:

In Babylon who will you worship and trust?

Who's going to have your heart...and where is your head going to be? When everything in you wants to quit...when everything in you and everyone around you is saying, “what are you doing?, bow down, move on, God has left you or forgot about you...”

Will you continue to worship and trust the Lord? These men do! They are committed to worshiping and trusting the Lord!

(v. 17-18) are full of worship and trust – “Our God CAN, but even if he doesn’t we’re not bowing down!” Talk about worship and trust!

ESV – “There was no doubt in the three men’s minds as to God’s power to save them. Yet the way in which God would work out his plan for them in this situation was less clear. God’s power is sometimes extended in dramatic ways to deliver his people, as when he parted the Red Sea for Israel on the way out of Egypt; at other times, that same power is withheld, and his people are allowed to suffer. Either way, they would not bow down to Nebuchadnezzar’s image.”

And Nebo is HOT!!! Pun intended! He turns the fire up!

Daniel 3:19-23 – “Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. (whole countenance changes!) He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated. ²⁰ And he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. ²¹ Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace. ²² Because the king's order was urgent and the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. ²³ And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace.”

Let me just point out here, we see bad things happening to good people! Don’t buy into the lie that when you follow the Lord nothing bad will ever happen – here we see following the Lord gets these guys in trouble! It gets them thrown into the fire!

See, for the Christian:

- Sometimes God will deliver people from the fire – he is the builder of our faith (protects you)...
- Sometimes he will deliver through the fire – he is the refiner of our faith (purifies you)...
- Sometimes he will deliver us by the fire – he is the perfecter of our faith (preserves you – even in death)...

Whatever way he chooses – he is sovereign and in control. We worship him AND we trust him KNOWING that if there is a fire – if we have to live in the (v 18 – But if not) he’ll be with us in the midst of it!

He was in the fire with Shadrach, Meshach and Abedego.

Daniel 3:24 – “Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, “Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?” They answered and said to the king, “True, O king.”²⁵ He answered and said, “But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods.” (Most scholars hold that this is what is called a “theophany” or “Christophany” – that is this is a preincarnate appearance of Jesus. He is with them IN the fire!)
²⁶ 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.²⁷ 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.²⁸ Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God.²⁹ Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way.” (THAT is a true statement!)
³⁰ Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.”

Babylon is a tough place to live. But, here’s the deal: God has not left us here alone. He is with us. This story proves that there is no one like him...that he is worthy of our worship...worthy of our trust.

So, by his grace, let’s give him our heart...our head...and commit today to never give in and to never give up. And when the heat is turned up, we can be confident that he WILL see it through.

Let’s pray.

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.