**BIBLE TALK Radio Broadcast**

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**Remaining Faithful Even When You Must Stand Alone**

**(The story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego)**

One of my favorite stories of the Bible is the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego recorded in Daniel chapter 3. These were three young Israelite men who were brought to Babylon during the captivity, and who served as administrators in the province of Babylon.

Daniel 3:1 says, *“Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its width six cubits. He set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.”* This image was about 9 feet wide and about 90 feet tall (that’s as high as a 7 to 9 story building). Nebuchadnezzar has gathered together all of his government authorities – *“the satraps, the administrators, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.”* (**3:2**) Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego have been called to this assembly. The instruction is this, *“To you it is commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, that at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, you shall fall down and worship the gold image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up; and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.”* (Dan. 3:4-6)

While Nebuchadnezzar’s gold image was elaborate, our objects of worship today take the shape of dollars, houses, cars, boats, vacations, Hollywood stars, musicians, and even pulpit preachers. To most of our objects of worship today we don’t bow a literal knee, but we bend our minds to them. Anything that holds your affection, controls your devotion, influences your moral standards, determines your decisions, wins your loyalty more than the One, true God, that is your object of worship. That’s your god. While we may not bow the knee, we can bow the mind. Paul makes mention of certain ones in Philippians 3:18-19 “whose god is their belly,” meaning their own fleshly lusts had become their god. Colossians 3:5 states that covetousness is idolatry.

I can’t say for certain where our nation is headed and how soon it is going to get there, but probably our government leaders and our society have yielded more to the gods of this world than in any other time in our nation’s history, and the situation that S. M. A. were in may soon take its own form in the 21st century. The same command that God had given to them as His people, He gives to us today – You shall have no other gods before Me; You shall not make for yourself a carved image; You shall not bow down to them nor serve them.

Verse 7-12 says that when all the people heard the music played, they fell down and worshiped the gold image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, all except Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. Can you picture this scene? The music starts and everyone falls to the ground, except S. M. A. It’s clear, there is no mistaking that they don’t bow. “Hey, get down. Don’t you know what is going to happen if you don’t bow?” someone may have said. Certain Chaldeans at that time came forward to Nebuchadnezzar and reported to him that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego *“do not serve your gods or worship the gold image which you have set up.”*  Verse 13 says, *“Then Nebuchadnezzar, in rage and fury, gave the command to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. So they brought these men before the king.”* The king said 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?* (verses 14)

I don’t know, but maybe Nebuchadnezzar is shocked. - “Who dares defy my authority? Who and why would anyone do this against me? Don’t they know who I am? Don’t they know my power over them? Don’t they know the consequences of this?

The world is often going to be shocked when everyone bows to the cultural trends and we don’t. There will be times when our refusal to conform is going to surprise people. It probably will even offend some people. When you buck the status quo at work, or at school, or even before family, because you know God would not be pleased, it may shock and offend some folks. We need to be ready for that. Peter said in 1 Peter 4:4, *“In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of* *dissipation, speaking evil of you.”*

Nebuchadnezzar says “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abe-Nego…?” Another way of viewing this could be that Nebuchadnezzar was disappointed. Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-Nego, no doubt, had been faithful, productive servants to the king. Could it be that Nebuchadnezzar was thinking, “Are not S.M. A. my friends. Look at what all I have given them. I have spared their lives, given them the best of Babylon, appointed them to powerful positions. It is hard to believe that they would rebel against Me.” “Is it true…?” Many times, it is easy to oppose those who are your enemies. I mean, aren’t we supposed to do that? But it is much harder to oppose those who have treated you with kindness. Goethe stated “Most men can oppose their enemies, but it takes a special person to oppose his friends.” S,M,A may have had to do this in this case and there may be times when you and I have to do this -- when we have to stand alone against our friends in order to please God.

Nebuchadnezzar offers them a second chance. He says to them in verse 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?"*  Nebuchadnezzar is pretty arrogant – “Who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?” It is interesting to notice in the scriptures that the rulers of pagan nations never seemed to grasp their place in God’s eyes. Pharaoh of Egypt was given a 10 lesson correspondence course on who God is. The Rabsheka of the Assyrians said to the Israelites, *”But do not listen to Hezekiah, lest he persuade you, saying, ‘The LORD will deliver us.’ Has any of the gods of the nations at all delivered its land from the hand of the king of Assyria?”* (2 Kings 18:32-33) They too received a lesson when God wiped out in the camp of the Assyrians 185,000 in one night. God is going to give a lesson to Nebuchadnezzar as well. We see this taking place, not only here in chapter 3 but also in chapter 4.

We have governing officials today who believe the same, that they have no account before God. They have disregarded God and His laws. They think they can do whatever they choose without consequence. They will eventually learn, as Nebuchadnezzar did *“that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.”* (Dan. 4:25) We as God’s people can take confidence in knowing that no matter what governing officials do, no matter what freedoms they may take, they are accountable to the one true God. He will execute justice, and we like S. M. A. can take confidence in that.

Now notice how S. M. A responded to king Nebuchadnezzar: *“O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. 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. 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.”* (vs 16-18) WOW! What a response. “We have no need to answer you in this matter.” They had already given their answer and it wasn’t going to change. They are saying to Nebuchadnezzar, “It doesn’t matter what you say, or what you do, we are not going to bow to that image. Our answer stands.”

We often worry about offending people with God’s answer. People ask us “Do you really think homosexuality is a sin? Do you really believe that only Christians are going to heaven? Are you telling me that one has to be baptized to be saved?” When we have given God’s answer, we don’t have to give a second answer. God’s answer is sufficient. We don’t have to water it down, or worldly it up. We don’t have to give another answer. Sometimes the answer is just going to offend. S. M. A. felt no need to satisfy the king in this matter. King Nebuchadnezzar had come into conflict with their King and that was the end of it. And when you stand in the presence of the King of kings and Lord of lords, smaller kings just don’t matter.

Remember, Nebuchadnezzar had asked, “And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?” S. M. A. said that “our God…is able to deliver us.” What made them think that? Had God told them? That’s not in the story. No doubt, they had heard from God’s law and prophets of how God delivered Israel from Pharaoh, and David from Goliath, and Elijah from Jezebel. If God wants to make it rain or snow, or give protective barrier, then He can. And He will. They knew that not only was God capable, but was willing to save those who are faithful. But they also knew that it was possible that it was not His will to save them at this time. And their attitude was, even if He does not deliver us, we will not bow. Is it possible to serve God, even when it does not pay in this life? S. M. A proves that it is possible. These men said, we will not bow whether God saves us or not. Also Job proved that one will serve God for nothing. After he lost everything, he said, *“Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall* *I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD.”* (Job 1:21) It is easy to bless God when He gives; can you bless the name of God when He allows Satan to take away ? Hab 3:17-18 says, “*Though the fig tree may not blossom, Nor fruit be on the vines; Though the labor of the* *olive may fail, And the fields yield no food; Though the flock may be cut off from the fold,* *And there be no herd in the stalls -- Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the* *God of my salvation.*  Our job is to glorify God, no matter what.

S. M. A did not bow, and they were cast into the burning fiery furnace. God protected them. They were not harmed.

They could have made a lot of excuses to bow – we are young; there are only 3 of us; Or we’ll bow the knee but not the heart, its just a gold image, we won’t mean it; Or we can live to serve another day; Or you can’t fight city hall; some things you gotta do to keep your job; Or will not bowing really make a difference? Did it make any difference? Well, here we are 2500 years later, taking encouragement and motivation from the faith of these three men, because they didn’t bow. You never know how the execution of your conviction is going to help others. But if you bow, there won’t be a story to tell, or an influence to encourage.

Our time is gone for today. We thank you for listening.

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