

**Daniel 3:13-27**

<sup>13</sup> Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, <sup>14</sup> and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, 'Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up?' <sup>15</sup> Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?' <sup>16</sup> Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. <sup>17</sup> If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. <sup>18</sup> But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." <sup>19</sup> Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual <sup>20</sup> and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. <sup>21</sup> So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. <sup>22</sup> The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, <sup>23</sup> and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace. <sup>24</sup> Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?" They replied, "Certainly, O king." <sup>25</sup> He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods." <sup>26</sup> Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!" So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, <sup>27</sup> and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.

### The God We Serve Is Able to Save Us

#### BLESSED ARE THE PERSECUTED

What shape would your face make if you had heard Jesus' sermon? <sup>11</sup> **Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven.**" (Matthew 5:11-12) What a radical thing to say, that it's blessed to be meek, weak, or persecuted. But Jesus wasn't the only one who said it. How would you react if you had been in Corinth and heard God's word in Paul's letter that God chose the weak things of this world to shame the strong. What a radical thing to say. But that's how it is. For millennia God has been working through meek, weak, persecuted people. That's why Jesus said, **"For in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."** (Matthew 5:12)

Today we'll consider three whose story proves what Jesus said. Three men whose story shows that God chooses the weak to shame the strong. Three men whose story shows that The God We Serve Is Able to Save Us. In fact, the God we serve was able to save these three men *twice*. Once he was able to save their bodies, but even greater than that, he was able to save their hearts.

#### THREE MEN PERSECUTED

Their names: Hannaniah, Mishael, and Azariah Those names honored the God they served. Hannaniah means "The Lord is gracious." Mishael means "Who is like God?" Azariah means "the Lord saved us." And in 606 BC they were young men serving the Lord. But then 605 BC happened. The Babylonian empire, the biggest,

baddest military and cultural force in the world came knocking on the gates of Jerusalem. They destroyed the city, stole the gold and kidnapped the best and the brightest including Hannaniah, Mishael, and Azariah. They gave them all new names to honor their new culture. Shadrach, a name that comes from the Babylonian god of the moon. Meshach which means “Who is like the moon god?” Abednego, the “nego” at the end of his name is a variation of Naboo, the Babylonian god of wisdom. Three men, named after gods whom they did not serve. If you ever feel like our culture is not so friendly toward Christians remember, **“In the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”** (Matthew 5:12) But these men had proven themselves to be every bit as bright as their captors thought they were. They were promoted to governors of their state.

The king of the whole empire was Nebuchadnezzar. You hear “naboo” in his name too. He called himself the son of Naboo, the son of god. He came up with a plan to honor his grandfather. He built a 90-foot-tall statue, covered it in gold, and made this rule: When you hear the music you worship. And if you don’t I’ll throw you in the blazing furnace.

## GOD SAVES THEIR BODIES

The statue was built, the music played; and with one motion a crowd of people folded into a sea of backs—except for three ridiculous protesters standing up. Nebuchadnezzar was furious. **“Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up?”** These men were so valuable that the king gives them a second chance. “Remember? When you hear the music, you worship. Or else... furnace! They wouldn’t do it. It was terrible news for them. Nebuchadnezzar turned on them, ordered the furnace seven times hotter and commissioned his strongest soldiers to tie them up. Terrible news for them, but perfect for God’s plan. Because the God we serve is able to save us.

Picture this moment like a prize fight. What the announcer would say. “In this corner, a lunatic king and he’s backed by the most powerful army on earth, and the most powerful soldiers in that army, and a blazing furnace! And in the other corner, three Jewish guys! And it looks like they’re backed by... no one.” So the soldiers threw them into the fire, it was so hot it killed the soldiers. Thee men fell into the middle of the flames. They looked meek, weak, and alone.

But the God we serve is able to save them. So Nebuchadnezzar jumped to his feet, “Didn’t we throw *three* men in there? I see four! Untied! One looks like a son of a god! Come out!” He grabs Meshach. \*SNIFF\* He didn’t even smell like smoke. Meek, weak, persecuted— yes. But not alone. What looked like bad news for them, was perfect for God’s plan. The God we serve was able to save them! He saved their bodies from the king, the army and the flames.

That’s the most famous part of the story, but it’s only one of the miracles God did that day. Before God ever saved their bodies, he saved their hearts.

## THREE MEN PERSECUTED AGAIN

To see that we have to rewind the story back before the fire, before the crowd bowed down, before the king’s command, when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego first heard about this golden idol. Everyone around them thinks *this* is god. Everyone vs. them. Imagine the moment when they heard the king’s command, “When you hear music, you worship the idol!” But they knew the First Commandment of the Lord: **“You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them.”** (Exodus 20:4) It was that god vs. the Lord. Imagine the moment the music played and everyone bowed down. An empire vs. three refugees. In those moments their

bodies were not in danger. This was the battle for their hearts.

In a battle for your heart it is easy to start making excuses, especially when you have a lot to lose. “We could bow down, and worship the Lord afterward. It’s not like we mean it.” That’s what warfare looks like in a battle for your heart.

If this were a prize fight, what would the announcer say? “In this corner, the most powerful and persuasive culture in the world, and it’s backed by Satan himself. *Plus*, they have spy in your camp, your sinful nature, which lives in you, hates God and wants to do wrong! And in the other corner, a guy.” We seem so meek, so weak. And we have fearsome enemies.

Have you ever been in a battle for your heart? You know you’re not supposed to do that with your boyfriend or girlfriend, but it’s you against your own desires, and you have a lot to lose! If you don’t they might miss out on something wonderful. It’s a battle for your heart. You know you Christians aren’t supposed to act that way, but it’s you against a whole culture. If you don’t follow along you will seem weird. It’s a battle for your heart. You know what the Bible teaches about homosexuality and abortion, but it’s you against the smartest and loudest people in the news. And you have a lot to lose. You might be labeled unloving. It’s a battle for your heart.

How’s your battle going? In a battle for your heart, it is so easy to start making excuses. But if you do, you will be on a road that leads away from the true God and away from his heaven.

## GOD SAVES THEIR HEARTS

I’m about to tell you the most amazing miracle you have ever experienced. The God we serve is able to save us— yes, even our in the battle for our hearts! Do not miss this miracle. The Lord God walked up to that prize fight ring and he saw the culture and the devil and your sinfulness. He turned to the other corner and he saw you weak and meek and helpless as you are! and he saw little old you, meek as you are. He stepped into the fight, and he walked to your corner. He said, I’m going to take care of all this evil, and we are going to walk out of here, champions. Jesus takes sides with those who have nothing to offer on their own. The God we serve is able to save us, and he has! That’s why we serve him! That’s why Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stood in the face of their enemies and acted like Hannahia, Mishael, and Azariah.

The king said “If you do not worship, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to save you?” And the Lord won the battle for their hearts! Read this with me. **“O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. <sup>17</sup> If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. <sup>18</sup> But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”** (Daniel 3:16-18)

Did you hear the two parts in their answer? First, the God we serve is able. “Nebuchadnezzar, you can do what you want, but God is so much stronger than you. He is able to save us.” You know that’s still true today. God is strong enough to give you a beautiful relationship even if you commit to chastity. God is strong enough to change your workplace so that they appreciate you Christianity. God is strong enough to preserve your reputation even as you proclaim the Bible’s controversial truths. The God we serve is able to save us from persecution.

But did you hear the second part of their answer? “But even if he doesn’t.” God is able to save me, but even if he doesn’t, I’m not going to compromise his truth. That is the central truth of being a disciple of Jesus. It means

that you love the happy situation God could give you but you love Jesus more. In the battle for our hearts, we stand up with Hannaniah, Mishael, and Azariah. God is strong enough to save us from persecution, but God might not. He might choose to save us right on through the persecution.

You might lose that relationship. You might lose that job. You might get labeled as unloving. God is strong enough to save you from those things, and he's strong enough to get your through them. For some of us the battle will be over soon. For others the battle will rage on. But no matter what the God we serve is able to save us.

## IN THE SAME WAY, THE PROPHETS BEFORE YOU

That's why we do Christian education. God wants kids to learn about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego so they can face high school and college with the confidence that the God we serve is able to save us. He wants high school students to review this story so they can stand up to this culture's temptations, stand up for Jesus. He wants parents to know the names Hannaniah, Mishael, and Azariah so they can honor the Lord like those men did. He wants those of you who are going home to heaven soon to face their earthly end being sure of salvation. God wants every single one of you to know that the God we serve is able to save us.

Amen.