

I. Introduction

- A. Welcome campers. Welcome to Camp Neighborhood. Here on Campfire Hill, we've been opening our hearts to the amazing collection of great stories from the Bible. David and Goliath. Daniel in the Lion's Den. Noah and the Ark.
- B. God still speaks through his Word.
- C. Today, one of the most vivid stories in the whole Bible, a story that has inspired me — and I have to confess haunted me — since I was a little boy. I'll explain why as we go.
- D. Today's story is from the ancient book of Daniel, in the Bible. It records a time in history six centuries before Christ.
- E. It is about three men named Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, but you might know them better as Shadrach, Meschach, and Abednego... Or maybe as Rack, Shack, and Benny (that's a Veggie Tales reference, in case you didn't know).
- F. They are thrown into a fiery furnace, and God walks with them in the flames.
- G. These three young adults go down in history as shining examples of the kind of faith that makes heaven more beautiful than before.

II. The Fiery Furnace

- A. *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. And King Nebuchadnezzar sent word to gather together 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. So the satraps, the administrators, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered together for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. (Daniel 3:1-3, NKJV).*
 - 1. The time period is about six centuries before Christ.
 - 2. The place is the province of Babylon, which is the capital of the empire of Babylon which now controls a large chunk of that part of the world. The ruler is King Nebuchadnezzar. A brutal warrior and a genius at building an empire.
 - 3. He builds this image of gold. It is tall and skinny, about ninety feet tall and nine feet wide. The gold makes it sparkle, and the height makes it visible for miles around. I would like to point out the numbers here. It's height is sixty cubits — and its width is six. Twice, you have the number six. Much later at the end of the Bible, the number 666 is called the number of a man.
 - a) [[By the way, some translations do the math for you. A cubit is 18 inches. So they calculate 90 feet tall, and 9 feet wide which is historically correct. But it misses the point textually—the literal focus on the number 6. We'll come back to this. That's why I like literal translations like the NKJV and the NASB.
 - b) *Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is six hundred and sixty-six. (Revelation 13:18, NKJV).*
 - 4. He calls in all his kings — and not just kings, but all the officials of every level of government.
 - 5. They are invited to come to a dedication of the image. A dedication. That's what the message said.
 - a) Let's look at lesson one from today's campfire story:
 - (1) *1. When humans claim ultimate power, the pain machine spits out ultimate sorrow.*
 - (a) Humanism is the religion that makes humankind ultimate. Humanism is the religion that would change In God We Trust into In Ourselves We Trust.
 - (b) Because the human heart is stinky inside, and unless it operates UNDER GOD, it makes itself its own God. Everyone does what seems right in their own eyes.
 - (c) The sad tale of human history shows the carnage, suffering, and pain that unchecked human power always leaves in its wake.
 - i) This fallen world is a morally broken pain machine.
 - ii) And the fallen human heart is its fuel. We need to bring the heart under God, which is the opposite of what king Nebuchadnezzar is interested in doing.
 - B. *Then a herald cried aloud: "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." So at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the horn, flute, harp, and lyre, in symphony with all kinds of music, all the people, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the gold image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. (Daniel 3:4-7, NKJV).*
 - 1. They were invited to a dedication service, but it turns into a worship service. Classic bait and switch.
 - 2. They are on Nebuchadnezzar's turf. How can they fight him? How can they resist? Resistance is futile. It's an instant death penalty. They're caught in his trap.
 - 3. Lesson two:
 - a) *2. Humanism is a religion that tolerates no competitors.*
 - 4. It sounds respectful. It sounds dignifying of the human race. But it is the opposite of how it sounds.
 - 5. Anyone who breaks from the universal worship of its self-proclaimed laws, its unfounded policies, its unbounded sexuality, its arbitrary ideology... if you break from the religion of the day, you are labeled dangerous, and you are killed, if not literally, at least by reputation.

6. A corrupt human soul doesn't settle for *loyalty*, it demands *worship*. Constant attention, focus, and devotion. And if you don't pet it enough, it either goes passive, and pouts, whines, and feels sorry for itself... or it goes aggressive and lashes out in violence.
7. Humans at the top of the heap is horrible. Humans are horrible rulers. When we're at the top, it's Lord of the Flies all the time. It's survival of the fittest. It's Babylon.
8. And it's where we live today.
9. Every generation is stuck in Babylon, to some degree or another.
10. Whenever the sovereign is greater than God, the pain machine roars like Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace.
- C. *So at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the horn, flute, harp, and lyre, in symphony with all kinds of music, all the people, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the gold image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. (Daniel 3:7, NKJV).*
 1. My son has a friend. His father was a missionary's son. Today the family has nothing to do with God, with church, or with God's Word. They're done with God.
 2. What will it take to make you done with God? How low is that threshold? Don't answer out loud, but what would you have done?
 3. You swim in a sea of monsters. There is pressure to conform on every side. It's not just external, it's internal too.
 - a) Not just the world, and the devil, but the flesh as well.
 4. Pressure to be like everybody else. Pressure to accept their laws as your laws and their truths as your truths. Pressure to not make waves. Pressure to bow to the idols of the age and a threat of death if you don't. Death to your status. Death to your reputation. Death to your friendship. Death to your career or your job. Death to your finances. Death to your freedom. Death to your body. If you don't dance to the world's tune, the threat is very real.
 5. The music played, and all the people, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the gold image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.
 6. What would you have done? This is what has haunted me since I was a little boy. It haunts me today.
 7. What would I have done?
- D. *Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and accused the Jews. They spoke and said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever! "You, O king, have made a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, shall fall down and worship the gold image; "and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. "There are certain Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego; these men, O king, have not paid due regard to you. They do not serve your gods or worship the gold image which you have set up." (Daniel 3:8-12, NKJV).*
 1. A vast sea of dignitaries, rulers, and power brokers — the elite and wealthy of the world. Thousands and thousands of them. The royal orchestra plays, and the music swells, and by the thousands, a sea of mighty monarchs falls to its knees, and touches its foreheads to the ground, and worships before the golden altar the king has set up.
 2. The devil's goal is universal worship. The devil's goal is universal religion. Any god but the true God. Any king but Jesus.
 3. But...Three men still stand. Tall, strong, proud, defiant, and different. Three men. Not much more than boys. Late teens, early twenties. And they have already learned a lesson that some people three times their age still haven't learned.
 - a) *3. Faith means so embracing God, and so embracing your truest self, that no deceptive force can ever seduce you to bow.*
 - (1) Not dysfunction from your past.
 - (2) Not peer pressure of today.
 - (3) Not your losses.
 - (4) Not your hoped for successes.
 - (5) Not angels, not demons.
 - (6) Not hopes, not dreams, not fears, not worries.
 - (a) God is on his throne. A God of all grace rules and reigns. He is your God, and you will not bow to any other God.
 4. What did those men have in their hearts that gave them guts like this?
 - a) They embraced God—
 - (1) They could rattle off a dozen attributes and two dozen names.
 - (2) They knew his promises.
 - (3) They knew his plan.
 - (4) They knew his heart.
 - (a) Later this same book of Daniel would declare, "But the people who know their God will be strong, and will do valiantly" (Daniel 11:32).
 - (b) And because they knew their God, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego could stand when every single person around them bowed.
 - (c) They embraced God... and
 - b) They embraced their truest selves—
 - (1) They were who God said they were, not who pompous Nebuchadnezzar said they were.
 - (2) We know them as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. But those weren't their real names.

- (3) Their real names were Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael.
 - (a) Hananiah—the Lord is gracious.
 - (b) Azariah—the Lord is my helper.
 - (c) Mishael—Who is like God?
5. But the king wanted to brainwash them, and the first thing he did was to give them new names.
 - a) Shadrach—Servant of Shin
 - b) Meshach—the shadow of the divine Prince
 - c) Abednego—Servant of Ishtar
6. Back in Israel, these men were Hebrew royalty. But here, they were told they were slaves of King Nebuchadnezzar.
7. Back home, they had names that told them who they really were—sons of the great God of heaven.
 - a) But here, they were named after false gods that are no gods.
8. The world will always try to limit you, control you, and define you. The world will try to rename you. Make you less than you are. Clip your wings so you can't soar. Rename you so you limp beneath your dignity.
9. And the temptation is always the same. To cave in. To acquiesce. To embrace an identity lower than your truest self. And to embrace a God lower than his revealed reality.
10. But these men had GUTS, and if you doubt it, listen to what happened when they were dragged before the king.
- E. *Then Nebuchadnezzar, in rage and fury, gave the command to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. So they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying 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? "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?" (Daniel 3:13-15, NKJV).*
 1. Isn't he reasonable? Doesn't it just make all the sense in the world to go along with him? Listen guys, I'm sure this has just been a big misunderstanding. You didn't get it. No worries. Here's another chance.
 2. And here's another lesson of G.U.T.S.:
 - a) *4. The false deceptions of the age cloak themselves in reasonableness... until you cross them.*
 - b) *And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. (2 Corinthians 11:14, NKJV).*
 3. If you go against the spirit of the age, you're the hater, you're the bully, you're the intolerant one. The spirit of this age is all about bullying people into submission. But it makes itself so reasonable, and loving. It is confusing. It is seductive. It makes evil sound so beautiful. It makes sin into a virtue. It sounds so caring when it's nothing but a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. This is Babylon. Smooth, deceptive, and flattering words.
 4. Hey guys, no big deal. Let's try this again. I'll have the orchestra play another tune, and let's just go with the flow. A little bow. A little kissing of the dirt. And we'll forget this whole thing happened.
- F. *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, "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." (Daniel 3:16-18, NKJV).*
 1. I told you they had guts.
 2. And again, I ask myself, what would I have done? What would I have said? This question haunts me.
 3. These guys have backbones of steel. They would rather burn than bow. To them, some things were worth more than life itself. They said,
 - a) *O Nebuchadnezzar... they didn't call him king, because at this point, there was another king who mattered immeasurably more. We have no need to answer you in this matter... We don't have to think about it, talk about it, pray about it, bargain about it. If that is the case... We don't know where this is going, but if you throw us in the fire...*
 - b) *Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace... A statement of fact, a statement of reality. God is able to deliver you from your burning fiery furnace, too. What is your fiery furnace? What is it that threatens your life, or that tempts you to bow? Money problems? Health problems? Can't see your future? School or grades, relationships?*
 - (1) God is bigger than it, stronger than it, greater than it, and tougher than it.
 - (2) Will you rest yourself into his care? Because the minute you say that, you can say what the three men say next:
 - c) *And he will deliver us from your hand, O king... One way or another, evil doesn't win, deception doesn't win, darkness doesn't win, Satan doesn't win. The big bully staring at you in the face doesn't win in the end.*
 - (1) Because the end is a place where every single shred of faith is overwhelmingly rewarded.
 - (a) Where every prayer is remembered and answered multiplied times over.
 - (b) Where every loss is repaid.
 - (c) Where every heartache is healed.
 - (d) And every single time you believed that God will win in the end, the heaven you received by faith just got immeasurably better by faith...

- i) And there will be for you in heaven superpowers and privileges that other people won't have, because you believed God's heart even when you couldn't see his hand.
 - (1) 5. *Heaven is a free gift by grace through faith, and not one bit a reward for behavior.*
 - (2) 6. *But in heaven God rewards your faith with treasures beyond comprehension.*
 - (a) *Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. (Hebrews 10:35, NKJV).*
 - (2) Might there be setbacks? Yes. Struggles? Yes. Doubts and fears? Yes. And that is their next sentence.
- d) *BUT IF NOT...* Those three words are the kiss of death to name it and claim it, health and wealth, prosperity preaching. But if not...
 - (1) I'm praying for a miracle, but if not. I'm moving out in faith, but if not. I'm trusting God for great things, but if not.
 - (a) God has promised to make you rich, but only in things that money can't buy.
 - (b) Would you like to be rich in money? Yes. Will you trust him, pray and give, and order your financial affairs in ways that honor God? Yes. But your faith does not twist God's arm. You do your job, and God will do his. Your job is faith, God's job is outcomes.
 - (c) The three men finish by saying...
 - e) *Be it known to you, O King, your gods, no serving, your gold image which you have set up, no bowing...* That's the faith that leaves the results to God.
 - f) And what amazing results happen in this story.
- G. *Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury, and the expression on his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. He spoke and commanded that they heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated. And he commanded certain mighty men of valor who were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, and cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their coats, their trousers, their turbans, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Therefore, because the king's command was urgent, and the furnace exceedingly hot, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. (Daniel 3:19-23, NKJV).*
 1. Every powerful ruler in the whole known world sees the three men go down into the flames. The whole world watches, and the whole world now knows exactly who is in charge...
 2. ...and it isn't Nebuchadnezzar.
- H. *Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished; and he rose in haste and spoke, saying to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king." "Look!" he answered, "I see four men, loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." (Daniel 3:24, 25, NKJV).*
 1. Six hundred years before Christ, he saw Christ.
 - a) They threw in three men, yet there were four.
 - b) They threw them in bound, yet they were loose.
 - c) They threw them into superheated flames, yet they were walking in the midst of the fire and are not hurt.
 - (1) 7. *No matter how hot the fire, God is with you in the flames.*
 - (a) *When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you. (Isaiah 43:2, NKJV).*
 2. If God is with you, God is for you. These men prayed against this fire, and now they are in it.
 3. And you prayed against your struggles. And now you are in them. But God is with you. Why? To make it a fair fight.
- I. *Then Nebuchadnezzar went near the mouth of the burning fiery furnace and spoke, saying, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here." Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego came from the midst of the fire. And the satraps, administrators, governors, and the king's counselors gathered together, and they saw these men on whose bodies the fire had no power; the hair of their head was not singed nor were their garments affected, and the smell of fire was not on them. Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, and they have frustrated the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God! "Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation, or language which speaks anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made an ash heap; because there is no other God who can deliver like this." Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego in the province of Babylon. (Daniel 3:26-30, NKJV).*
 1. The king is astonished. The world saw God. Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah are promoted.
 2. And none of it would have happened if God had answered their prayers not to be thrown into the fire.
 3. Every analogy we draw about God fails at some point, but I hope this one makes sense to you.
 - a) 8. *Evil is a nasty glove, and God sticks his hand in it to bring about good against its will.*
 - b) *"But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good." (Genesis 50:20).*
 4. Whatever idol you see this week, whatever furnace you face... Evil is a nasty glove, and God sticks his hand in it to bring about good, against its will, if you...just won't bow.