**Kingdom Challengers**

***Daniel 3***

A pastor friend pointed me to a recent article in the Wall Street Journal entitled **“We Are Starting to Enjoy Hatred".** This is an interesting title and likely refers to the growing animus that people in our country have toward those who do not share their political views. **And while I agree that the sin of hatred is growing stronger in our culture, hatred has always been a sensual sin enjoyed by those committing it.**  For instance, Cain enjoyed hating Abel or he would have repented before he committed murder. Every person enslaved by a sin finds some enjoyment or pleasure in it or they would depart from it.

**Satan is the original hater.** He hates the LORD first and foremost. He hates that God is sovereign over everything and that he is not. He hates that God receives any praise from any person because he thinks that praise should be to him. **If we understand this about Satan, we will understand what motivates him to hate God’s people so much**. We will also see his role in inspiring the people of this world to hate those who love the LORD.

In our story today, we find Nebuchadnezzar hating three young men with a murderous kind of fury. **I believe that Nebuchadnezzar is inspired by Satan both in his exaltation of himself above the LORD AND also in his murderous design for those who ONLY worship the LORD.** Nebuchadnezzar is a type of anti-Christ who God teaches us will appear in the last days.

**Five Expectations About Spiritual Conflict** that God reveals to His people as we live in this present age:

1. **Our whole world is presently under the influence of the devil who hates all that is good.**

*“We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.”*

*(1 John 5:19* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#1John_5:19)*)*

1. **The world hates God and it hates every person who worships the LORD.**

 *“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.” (John 15:18-19* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#John_15:18)*)*

1. **Christ-followers are loved by God and so His love rules in our hearts.**

*“By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother . . . Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.” (1 John 3:10; 4:7* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#1John_4:7)*)*

1. **While followers of Jesus hate evil, we are not among those who hate people. We love even our enemies praying for God to bless them with His grace and mercy.**

 *“But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.” (Luke 6:27-28* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#Luke_6:27)*)*

1. **God guarantees victory to overcome the world to all who live by faith.**

*“For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.” (1 John 5:4* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#1John_5:4)*)*

 From our story in Daniel 3, we will learn how to live by faith in a world that hates God and hates us for loving God. We will learn the nature of the battle that God ordains us to fight. We will learn of His victory that overcomes the world.

**Main Idea: The world will challenge our allegiance to God. The LORD will stand with us and for us as we commit to walk by faith in Him.**

Remember our story ended last week with Nebuchadnezzar being humbled by the dream that God gives to him and that Daniel interpreted for him. He falls on his face before Daniel and pays homage to him. He says to Daniel, “*Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery.”* (Daniel 2:47 [ESV](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#Dan._2:47)). It seems as though Nebuchadnezzar has been converted!

 Neb. Then gives Daniel high honors in his government. He lavishes Daniel with expensive gifts. He makes Daniel ruler over the whole province of Babylon and gives him the lead role over all the wise men in Babylon. Daniel is grateful, but he makes a request.

He says, *“King Neb., my three friends whom you know as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were key to my receiving the revelation from the LORD regarding your dream. They prayed with me all through the night for the God of heaven to have mercy upon us and to reveal the dream to me. Without their prayers, I would have been lost. They had as much to do with God having favor upon me as anyone. So, will you promote them to positions of authority in your kingdom too?”*

*“Absolutely!” And Daniel’s three friends were given positions of authority in the Babylonian government too!*

Well, Daniel and his three friends are on Easy Street with a life of peace and prosperity. But this easy life does not last for long for them.

You see, Neb. repentance was like many who repent when God emotionally shakes them with fear . . . **his repentance is superficial, not lasting, without enduring fruit.**

**Principle: It is common for dramatic events in life to spiritually soften the heart of the unregenerate only to have that same heart harden to deeper extreme.**

Nebuchadnezzar is sincere in chapter 2. He is not faking his verbal confession. He FEELS it. Yet it is a confession without devotional depth . . . without personal surrender.

The Septuagint tells us that about 16 years pass between Daniel 2 and 3. As Neb. thinks about his dream over these 16 years, he does not like the fact that he is only the head of gold and that three other kingdoms will follow him after his kingdom collapses. He gets offended at that idea and becomes filled with a longing for personal glory. He wants his glory to last forever and ever. He thinks, “Why shouldn’t my kingdom last forever?” So he orders that a huge statue like the one in his dream to be cast. This statue is 90 feet tall and nine feet wide and it is made of gold from top to bottom!

Nebuchadnezzar sends out word to over official all through his entire empire to come from near and far to the dedication ceremony of this golden image. The officials all know that they cannot disobey this command and so they all pour in to the capital city . . . satraps and governors and prefects and counselors and treasurers and justices and magistrates . . . every one who has any official part in Neb’s government is there . . . including Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. Now we know these three by their Babylonian names . . . Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

The day was bright and sunny. The huge crowd gathered around the golden image. The word has spread through all the nations about this day. People from all over the world have come to the dedication Nebuchadnezzar’s golden creation of Neb. They all want to be in his good graces!

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego understand why Neb. created this image . . . he no longer considers Yahweh to be the God of heaven, but has turned his heart away from Him. They remember what happened to their own people of Judah when they built similar idols. They know that the LORD will not bring favor upon any nation that chooses to rebel against Him and to worship false gods. They bow their heads to pray for God to be merciful and to send repentance to Neb’s heart before it is too late!

Shadrach says, “I believe the king will command us to worship this statue. Friends, you know what we must do.” They all nodded their heads without having to say anything. They bow their heads again and Shadrach prays, “Yahweh, you are the only true God and we worship you. Strengthen us to obey you regardless of the cost. You are our refuge and our strength. Deliver us for the sake of Your Name!”

These three are standing in the middle of this huge crowd and talking about these matters when suddenly a trumpet blows! The noisy crowd immediately quiets . . . so still you can now hear the chirping of desert birds. The king’s herald cries out with a voice so loud that it carries across the thousands that are gathered this day.

 *“You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, 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. And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace.”” (Daniel 3:4-6* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#Dan._3:4)*)*

Nebuchadnezzar anticipates that some will be reluctant to bow down and worship his new god. So he incentivizes the worship of this gold statue by building a huge furnace nearby as a visual reminder that he is serious about the consequences that he announces to any who refuse to bow their knee. He thinks, ***“This threat will cause everyone to comply!”***
 The air is torn by the sound of horns, bagpipes, lyres, trumpets and other instruments blowing all in unison! This is the call to worship! In mass, everyone falls to their knees as quickly as they can! No one wants to be considered slow to obey the king’s command!!! They all give voice to their worship of this image. **All . . . all . . . all . . . except for three. Three young men remain standing.**

 Now the crowd is so large that Neb does not personally see three disobedient young men. But other officials in Neb kingdom do. These already hate Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego for the way that they did not join in their parties and their practices. They have been jealous of them for some time and one says, “Those self-righteous guys are in for it now! Let us go tell the king about them and be rid of them for good!”

 Trembling they ask for an audience with the king. When they arrive before Neb they bow in submission to him and say, *“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 worshipc shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace. 12 There are certain Jews whom you have appointed 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.”*

Neb. is furious! More angry than he has ever been in his life. He demands that these three be brought to him immediately. And when they are before him, he asks, *“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?”” (Daniel 3:14-15* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#Dan._3:14)*)*

I do not know how much time has passed since Neb made his confession to Daniel about the LORD being the God of gods. **But this I do know, “Many make verbal confessions without heart worship. And without heart worship, no one is transformed . . . no one is spiritually saved.”**

 **Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego do not need any time to pray over this matter. They already KNOW what the LORD has for them to do. They have already made up their mind even before they saw this golden statue and heard the threat of the fiery furnace.**

*“Daniel 3:16 “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. Daniel 3:17 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. Daniel 3:18 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.”” (Daniel 3:16-18* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#Dan._3:16)*)*

Neb’s face grows red with anger as he spits to his guards, “Make the fire seven times hotter than it is!! Bind these three fools and throw them into it! Now!!” The guards did as commanded! They through Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into the furnace with their coats and hats and shirts on. As the guards walked the three toward the furnace, they felt the heat and they wanted to turn back, but they knew that Neb would kill them if they did. They tried to rush the three into the fire so that they could escape the heat, but in the process it was too much!! They guards fell to the ground as they pushed the three into the flames and the guards died right there in front of the furnace.

 As Neb looked on with his face full of fury, his mouth suddenly fell open. He saw the three walking inside the fiery furnace! Their ropes were burned, but their clothes were not and they looked like they were walking on the beach! No distress. No pain. BUT MORE! King Neb saw a fourth man walking with them!

 He exclaimed to his counselors, “““Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?” (Daniel 3:24 [ESV](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#Dan._3:24))

 “Yes! That is true. Three and no more!”

 “““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.””

(Daniel 3:25 [ESV](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#Dan._3:25))

 Well, we KNOW who that is. That fourth was Jesus before He became a man. He was walking with the three faithful Jews who chose to obey God rather than man.

 Neb rushed near to the door of the furnace and shouted, “““Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here!”” (Daniel 3:26 [ESV](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#Dan._3:26))

The three friends came out of the furnace smiling. And the kings and all his royal officials saw that the fire that was hot right in front of them had no power over the bodies of these men. The hair of these three was not singed. The clothes was not charred. Why, they did not even smell like smoke!

 Neb bows his head and exclaims, *““Daniel 3:28 “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. Daniel 3:29 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.””* (Daniel 3:28-29 [ESV](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#Dan._3:28))

 And the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to even greater positions of authority. They knew that without faith it is impossible to please God and they care more about what God thought of their lives than what anyone else thought of their lives. God alludes to these three in His chapter on people who lived by faith and proved His power and glory.

*“And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.” (Hebrews 11:32-34* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#Heb._11:32)*)*

These three chose to live by faith in God rather than by their natural senses. They could see and feel the fire in front of them, but the fire is not ultimate . . . God is. And that changed the way that they lived their lives. I think of Paul’s words,

*“So we do not lose heart . . . we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal . . . we walk by faith, not by sight.” (2 Corinthians 4:16-18, 5:7* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#2Cor._4:16)*)*

Let us ask the question, “How can I grow my faith so that I too live by faith and not by sight?”

**Four Principles for Living by Faith**

**Faith’s Forge of Friendship: God intends our faith to be strengthened through our relationship with other believers.**

*“Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.” (Proverbs 27:17* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#Prov._27:17)*)*

*Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.” (Ecclesiastes 4:11-12* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#Eccl._4:11)*)*

 These verses are not simply remarking upon our emotional and social need to have some people around us and to be part of community. If we are to grow in faith, God provides us to a KIND of community where HE is the CENTER. This means a kind of community that prays together, worships together, talks about the LORD together, reads scripture together, ministers the Gospel together.

**Principle: Just as a garden needs water to flourish with fruit, so we need other believing friends to flourish in faith.**

**God’s whole design for His church in our age is that we walk forward in faith together.** God does not intend for us to try to live out our faith without believing friends encouraging us, praying with us, exhorting us and caring for us.

There are times when God ordains for His people to be isolated. I think of Joseph in the OT. He had no friends to encourage him to remain faithful to the LORD. **BUT the ORDINARY means that God uses to help us live by faith is by placing us with other friends who wish to live for the LORD as well.**

Too many in our day try to live by faith apart from any real connection to our brothers and sisters in Jesus’ church. They try the “GO IT ALONE” approach. Why do they do that?

Four reasons God’s people try to go it alone:

1. Satan discourages them through past painful experiences. We think, *“Why should I try Christian friendships when I get hurt for allowing others to get close to me?”*
2. Satan deceives them into thinking that they are strong enough on their own. We think, “*Hey, I think I have got this. I can do it!”*
3. Satan intimidates them through the fear of being vulnerable. We think, *“I am uncomfortable letting others know who I am. I often fail and am weak and I do not want others to see that.”*
4. Satan distracts them with other priorities. We think, *“I would love to invest in building Christian relationships in my own church family. But right now there is too much going on at work, with my kids, with sports programs, with the house I just bought. Life is too busy for that right now!”*

Is anything keeping you from building relationships where God is the center and you can talk together about the struggles, you can pray over the trials and you can encourage one another in the faith?

**Faith’s Fight for Fidelity: God designs us to fight against the pressures of the world, the flesh and the devil in order to remain faithful to Him.**

“Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.” (1 Timothy 6:12 [ESV](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#1Tim._6:12))

**Why is the life of faith so hard?** Because we have an enemy that is trying to rob God of His glory and to destroy us. He wants more than anything to disconnect us from God through undermining our faith. He is going to make a life of faith very hard . . . in fact, he will make it appear impossible!

Friends, as we commit to living a life of faith, let us expect strong opposition! Expect the world to throw you into situations where if you make a choice to honor the LORD, you will be made to pay a big cost.

**Principle: The world intends to subject us all to its demeaning and demonic demands. This subjection often finds a moment in life when it reaches a crisis.** The decision we make in that crisis moves us toward the LORD or away from Him. **The effect upon our soul is definitive and often unalterable.**

Protest, “But no one is demanding that I bow to a gold statue. How does this relate to my life today?” Some practical ways that you will be pressured to bow your knee to the golden statue.

1. You may be pressured to speak with language that dishonors God or else to be an outcast from the group.
2. You may be pressured to wear flags and symbols that celebrate sins against the LORD or else be cut from the team.
3. You may be pressured to be silent about God and His commandments in public settings or else be ridiculed and shamed.
4. You may be pressured to lie by calling someone by a pronoun that is not rooted in who God created them to be or else be fired from your job.
5. You may be pressured by a boyfriend or girlfriend to act in ways that dishonors God and marriage or else be set aside.
6. You may be pressured by your job to gain money through deceit or compromise or else lose out on promotions.

In these and many more scenarios, we can expect situations where we are commanded to bow our knee to some other god than the LORD. These are moments of crisis where we will **either grow in faith or grow in compromise.**

The whole theme of Daniel answers the question, “Who is God? Who is in control of this world?” It may seem like a small thing to bow down to a statue. But to these three men is was a matter of worshipping God as God or worshipping something else as God. Are you ever pressured to worship something else than the LORD?

Satan offers us many excuses for compromising our worship of the LORD

1. I have no other option.
2. God wants me to obey the authorities.
3. Others are doing the same.
4. The cost is too great.
5. The LORD will forgive me.

**These moments are crossroad for us where the whole direction of our life will change either toward worship or toward worldliness.** It matters how we respond in these moments!!

**Friends, we can be of good cheer like the three young men! Man means these crisis to destroy us, but God means them to grow us!**

**Truth: God ordains some of His children to endure overwhelming temptation and hardship. With His ordination He gives His sufficient supply.**

*“In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:6-7* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#1Pet._1:6)*)*

Question: Will I be a slave of the world or will I be one who overcomes the world?

We can allow ourselves to be victims or by faith become victors.

*In this world we must be either conquerors or slaves. We know what it is to be the world’s slaves, but what it is to be conquerors through Christ, that no man knows entirely. We come to know it more and more as the long struggle and fight go on. We shall know it perfectly only when the liberated spirit casts the flesh away and goes to live with the God by whom it has lived so long.* Philiips Brooks

**Faith’s Footpath to Favor: Faith leads us directly into the world’s hatred of us. Yet God designs even this hard part of the path to deepen our faith and bring us added blessing.**

Think of the exhilaration of these three men as they stepped into the fire and were not burned. They saw the guards consumed. They saw their ropes burned away. Yet nothing else was burned. They did not even break a sweat inside the furnace. AND best of all, they had a fourth like a son of God walking with them!!

These four would not have experienced God’s favor without the fire ordained for them. What is true of these three is true of us too!

**My favorite verses of this whole story, perhaps of the whole book of Daniel.**

*Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. 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. 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.”” (Daniel 3:16-18* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#Dan._3:16)*)*

The three did not KNOW HOW God would favor them. BUT they knew that HE would favor them in a way that is eternally good. The LORD sometimes delivers us from death and sometimes He delivers us through death. **In all, He is LORD and He blesses and protects His own forever.**

 *“Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.” (Luke 6:22-23* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#Luke_6:22)*)*

Do you wish for the favor of God upon your life? Believe! Receive His love! **GOSPEL HERE!**

Then because He loves you, love him with a love that is not corrupted by the pressures of the world!

“Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.” (Ephesians 6:24 [ESV](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#Eph._6:24))

**Faith’s Finding of Fantasticness: Faith’s reward is beyond our wildest imagination. Seeing God’s glory is the best of gifts.**

I can only imagine the fantastic experience of these three as the LORD walked with them in the fire. The best part for them is the presence of the LORD. What did they talk about? What did He say? We are not told. But it was glorious!!

**God’s promised presence in the fire feeds our faith.**

*for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” So we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?”” (Hebrews 13:5-6* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#Heb._13:5)*)*

Faith always leads to glory and blessing and joy!

*For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen.”*

*(2 Corinthians 4:17-18* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#2Cor._4:17)*)*

*“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” (Romans 8:18* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#Rom._8:18)*)*

**Faith ALWAYS is rewarded with a glory too wonderful for words. And what is the best part of our reward? It is God Himself. He gives us His very own Person to be with us, to never leave us, to never forsake us, to love us forever and ever.**

**It is faith that brings God near to us, even as faith brought God near to these three.**

*“Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” (1 Peter 1:8-9* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#1Pet._1:8)*)*

These three young men walked by faith because they KNEW the GOD who is. Do you know Him?

Conclusion: To be ready to walk by faith we must be ready to walk away from our present world. We are in the world and we minister to the world. But when the world calls us to conform to its worship, we live by faith and we walk away.

**Faith’s Forge of Friendship**

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**Faith’s Finding of Fantasticness:**