



As we continue with The Story, God's people are in exile, living in Babylon. As a nation, they have gone from slavery in Egypt, to wandering in the wilderness, to crossing into their own land, to building a permanent temple to worship God, to having their great nation divided, and finally to being a small remnant living in Babylon.

Self-reliance has brought the nation of Israel nothing but disaster and the captivity they are currently living in. God-reliance has brought supernatural resolutions over and over—crossing the Jordan at flood stage, marching around Jericho, Gideon fighting with only 300 men, David vs. Goliath, Hezekiah's prayer, etc.

In the book of Daniel the people of God encounter multiple problems. That's no surprise—God's special people are doing their best to make it as strangers in the foreign land of Babylon. See if this sounds familiar:

- » They are living in a place that is not their true home.
- » They have decent jobs and are able to care for their families.
- » They get up. Go to work. Pick up their kids at school. Eat dinner together. Go to bed and start all over the next day.
- » They are God's chosen people, surrounded by pagans who are worshipping false gods. They long for something else, something better, to live in their true home. Each day brought temptations to live just like the Babylonians. In fact, it was encouraged. No doubt each day they navigated complicated situations where sometimes compromise was appropriate and other times iron-clad faithfulness to God's way was the only right choice.

Does that sound familiar to your life? It should. The New Testament calls a Christian an ambassador—we live in a place that is not our home. The Christian is called a foreigner and a stranger because nowhere on earth is truly our home. It says that a Christian lives in a body that's like a tent, while we wait for our permanent home in heaven.

Many of the temptations that God's people faced in Babylon related directly to their faith. In 6th century BC the Babylonians conquered people and deported the professional classes back to their land. The strategy: subjugation through deportation. In a generation or two the conquered nation would assimilate into Babylonian culture and stop resisting them.

The book of Daniel is primarily about one man, Daniel, and three of his friends: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Turn to Daniel

3:14-29 for our passage of scripture today. We're going to see three things in these verses:

- » Pressure of pluralism
- » Precision of true faith
- » Persistence to be God-reliant

... 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? Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe 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?"

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, "King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

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 and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. 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, and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

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, Your Majesty."

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."

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, 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.

Then Nebuchadnezzar said, “Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king’s command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way.”

### Pressure of Pluralism

*“Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up?”* (v. 14).

It was a 90-foot idol. What did the image mean? It’s never given a name. In verse 14 Nebuchadnezzar reveals what the idol represents—“serve my gods; worship the image of gold.” The idol represents all of the gods of Babylon; all of Babylonian culture.

In essence Nebuchadnezzar is saying, “I’m not asking that you worship the Babylonian gods instead of your gods. I’m asking that you worship the Babylonian gods in addition to your gods.” You can worship your gods, as long as you don’t say they are the only gods. You can worship your gods, as long as you respect and honor and worship everyone else’s gods too. This meant you had to privatize your faith, privatize your values. The way you live has to blend with everyone else.

All pluralistic cities do the same thing—Babylon, ancient Rome, the San Francisco peninsula. Privately you can worship any way you want. But publicly, you must do like everyone else. Don’t think that your religion is exclusive. This is how every pluralistic culture works.

Some examples of this are: **Christians in the business world.** People around you are ruthless and sometimes barely legal. It puts a tremendous amount of pressure on you. They are your competitors and colleges. If you, as a Christian, decide that you have to be just as ruthless, you have succumbed to the pressure. Bowed to the pressure. Bowed to image. In your private life, you say you’re a Christian. You say you believe in the teachings of Jesus and the Bible, the attitudes of the Bible, but you live like everyone else in the world.

**Sexual behavior.** A couple of sociologists have come out with a massive study on the sexual behavior of younger people, *Premarital Sex in America*. It studied two groups of men: unmarried, college educated, males 18-23; the first group raised thinking nothing is wrong with sex outside of marriage; the second group raised thinking there is something wrong with sex outside of marriage. 23% are virgins in the first group; 28% are virgins in the second group.

The sociologists conclude from this that although the two groups would say they have different beliefs on the practice of sex outside of marriage, they behave exactly the same. The difference between 23% to 28% is inconsequential.

Why? Your church tells you something about sex and your culture tells you something about sex and the young men believe what their culture says. In essence, these young men are saying, my private beliefs and opinions are kept private. My actions will align with popular opinion. They have succumbed. They are bowing to the image.

Sometimes I’m asked to pray at public events that aren’t Christian in nature: a school assembly, a City Council meeting, Boy Scout meeting or a Chamber of Commerce meeting. I’m pressured in every situation. Do you know how? To privatize my faith in Jesus. They do not want me to pray in the name of Jesus because it’s too exclusive. Instead, they want me to pray so generically that all faiths can resonate with my prayer and no one is offended.

All pluralistic cultures put pressure on us to privatize our faith. But Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego will have nothing of it.

Who are these guys? They are deeply involved in the Babylonian culture. They’re educated, administrators in the government. They are not living in a self-created bubble, running away from their culture. They are fully immersed in their culture. They are co-workers with and friends with Babylonians.

They are doing exactly what Jeremiah 29 says they should do—pray for their city, love their city, work for the prosperity of the city, work to make their city successful. But when asked to privatize their faith, they say, “no.” It’s very brave.

We’re under the same pressure. And if you don’t know it, that means you’ve given in to it. If you aren’t getting push back, ever, you’ve given in to it.

### Precision of True Faith

In verses 17–18 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego say,

**“If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty’s hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”**

Consider how accurate or precise their faith is. They aren't living bargaining with God. You know how that goes. A person says, "I've trusted God with my whole life, I've sacrificed for him. I've given money to the church and served in my church. Now God, I'm asking you to do (blank) for me. I really want you to come through for me." They aren't blaming God for their predicament. They aren't jumping to the conclusion that God's will is going to bring them a good outcome.

All of these thoughts reveal you're not really trusting God. You're trusting God, plus, plus, plus. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are trusting God. Period. Nothing else. Their faith is precise. As a result they can handle anything.

Verse 17 says, *"The God we serve is able ... he will deliver us from your Majesty's hand."* Yahweh is all-powerful and sovereign. God is more powerful than the most powerful people on earth. Behind their statement is the confidence that physical death is not their end. They're saying that physical death brings a rescue from the king and an entrance into the ultimate rescue from the sting of death into eternity and heaven. C.S. Lewis wrote, "If you look for truth, you may find comfort in the end; if you look for comfort you will not get either comfort or truth only soft soap and wishful thinking to begin, and in the end, despair."

When Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego made this statement, they'd already won. They were spiritually fire proof before they were physically fire proof. It's just like the Apostle Paul said. If you kill me that's fine. I'm going to see Jesus. But if you don't kill me, that's fine too, I'll keep on preaching and God is glorified through that. Such confidence and precision in his faith! You can have this confidence too. By trusting in God alone, not God, plus, plus, plus.

### **Persistence to be God-reliant**

When Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to bow to the idol, they showed themselves to be God-reliant, the very attitude God has wanted from his people since he chose Abram in Ur. When they explained themselves to King Nebuchadnezzar, they showed themselves to be God-reliant.

Think of their boldness. They stood their ground. They spoke up. They had true faith. As a result, Nebuchadnezzar is furious! Imagine the pressure they feel after Nebuchadnezzar's rant to just give in and bow to the image.

It appears that everyone else, by the way, has chosen that path. Others have evaluated the pros and cons and made some kind of decision to rely upon their own survival strategies. Maybe they've said, "I'll bow with my body but not with my heart." Maybe they've said, "In some situations I trust God with everything but not when something really serious is on the line."

As Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are walking up to the furnace, knowing the horror that awaits them, imagine the pressure

they feel to just give in. To give in to that choice, to take the path of blending in. It's right before them.

How far will they take their God-reliance? Are they willing to be labeled a Bible-believing follower of God? Logic would say, "Bow." But faith whispers, "Keep going. You can go further than you think. You can withstand more pressure than you think. You don't have to give in to temptation. With God's strength working in you, you can always keep walking in God-reliance."

C.S. Lewis said, "Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point." At the moment of their testing Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego take step after step after step of faith walking directly into the fire. The result is supernatural.

Nebuchadnezzar sees two shocking things: The three men are walking around in this crazy fire, and he sees a fourth man who looks like a son of the gods.

What do we learn here? God-reliance brings supernatural resolutions. Do you want to see God move in supernatural ways? Then you need to trust God with everything. Maybe 2015 could be a year filled with more God-reliance and more supernatural activity in your life. Are you trusting God with everything or are you trusting him with some?

The message of the Gospel is the same: self-reliance won't work. We are unable to save ourselves. Attempts to save ourselves, in fact, destroy a person. That's why Jesus had to die on the cross, on our behalf. Because our self-reliant attempts to make it in life and eternity are doomed for failure.

God-reliance brings supernatural resolutions and glory to God. After Nebuchadnezzar brought Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego out of the furnace, he had a complete turn around. In verses 28–29 he said, *"Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, ... for all the supernatural work He's done. Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way."*

The Lord loves to display **his** glory and power and faithfulness and righteousness and goodness. In contrast, the Lord is offended when people mock and ridicule him. And Nebuchadnezzar is learning this message. God wants to show his glory because he's holy and humanity is most satisfied when they see it and respond in a life of worship. The best thing for anyone is to truly see the brokenness of this world and the transcendent glory of God.

Think of a problem or a temptation or an obstacle you're facing right now. Don't play it safe, think of something unsolvable. What does a God-reliant response look like for your situation? Surrender it to Jesus. Cry out to God in prayer. Repent of your attempts to solve it in self-reliant ways. When you do, we reveal

that we are God-reliant and supernatural resolutions start occurring. God is ready to bring supernatural resolutions to your life. But he won't do it if you continue in self-reliance.

Suffering and the threat of suffering are God's best tools to test our reliance on him. In the Bible furnaces and fire are a metaphor of suffering and trials. So we could all say we are facing the threat of a fiery furnace. But these are the times when God's glory is most exemplified. He saves. He rescues. He heals. He moves, overcomes whatever is causing our suffering and his glory is seen.

In the 1950's Brother Andrew started delivering Bibles to Eastern European and Communist countries by smuggling them in. On his first trip into Romania he drove his car, filled with Bibles, up to the border crossing. There were six cars in front of him. He considered himself lucky. This would be a quick crossing.

Forty minutes passed and the same car was being inspected. The guards were removing everything from the cars: luggage was unpacked and spread out, hub caps removed, seats removed, parts of the engine were taken apart.

Brother Andrew was accustomed to unsolvable problems like this. He prayed, "Dear Lord, what am I going to do? Any serious inspection will show up those Romanian Bibles right away. I know that no amount of cleverness on my part can get me

through this border search. Dare I ask for a miracle? Let me take some of the Bibles out and leave them in the open where they will be seen. Then, Lord, I cannot possibly be depending on my own stratagems, can I? I will be depending utterly upon You."

He inched his VW up to the officer who was standing on the left side of the road, handed his passport and travel visa over and started to get out of the car for his inspection. But the guard's knee was against the door, holding it closed. The guard scribbled on his visa, shoved his passport back to him and abruptly waved him to drive on.

Andrew inched forward slowly, unsure of the next step. He wondered if he'd been selected for a special inspection but none of the guards were paying attention to him. In his rearview window he saw the guard waving the next driver up indicating he had to stop and open his hood.

Andrew's heart was racing with excitement at seeing God's supernatural power at work. He drove into Romania with his car filled with Romanian Bibles.

This is what living a God-reliant life looks like, a life filled with supernatural resolutions.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*