**THE GOD WE SERVE IS ABLE TO DELIVER US**

Daniel 3:1-30 (Key Verse: 17, 18)

“If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us[c] from Your Majesty’s hand. 18 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.”

In today’s passage, the Lord God delivered the Hebrew men; Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from Nebuchadnezzar; the ruler of the kingdom of Babylon. We are moved by the courage of these men, who stood firm on their faith to serve the only true King, the only true God. In the face of severe consequences for not bowing before the image of gold, they remained faithful to God, and did not bow. While the entire kingdom was afraid of the king’s command, were thousands obeyed and bowed to this image of gold, these three men defied the word of the king, and did not bow. They chose to worship the true living God who is able to deliver them. Moreover, even if the Lord God would not save them; even if they would be consumed by the fire, they resolved to rather die with their faith in the Lord God, than to be swayed to bow to the image of gold. They resolved not to value even their lives, for they feared the only living God who after death, is able to raise the dead with His power, and bring all to His judgement. May we know this God, so that we are not left to bowing down to the golden images set up in our lives, but rather develop courage and resilience in our faith to remain faithful and true to Him even against real adversity, even when faced with losing our lives and livelihoods.

We are in a world where people live by compromises, largely because they fear the cost of not compromising. This becomes a motivation to rebel against God, and follow the easy evil ways of the world, because in so doing, there will be no pain, nor harm. Recently, South Africa and the US have been facing off in what we’d call political differences. As a result, the super nation USA has threatened and later signed an order to withdraw funding to South Africa, and revoking some trade agreements. The USA claims that South Africa is engaged in practices that are bad, and discriminating against whites for signing the bill that would give the state power to expropriate land for public use. This brought an economic and political stir more so in the government of South Africa. Because some political parties are happy with associating with the powerful USA’s Donald Trump, and appeasing him, they’d rather agree with the misguided views of USA regarding SA’s policies for fears that they would loose trading agreements and funding from the USA.

These days, even many Christians are seen compromising on their beliefs, so as to avoid being persecuted and being treated as outcasts. Because of the fear of pain and suffering when standing for the truth of God, they’d rather disobey God so that they can keep the peace and protect their livelihoods. As a result, many Christians are bowing to the images of gold in their lives so that they might not face in harm or discomfort or backlash. However, we thank God for this passage, to learn from these three for denying to bow down to the image of gold even at a great cost of their lives, and livelihoods.

Look at verse 1-3. **1 King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, sixty cubits high and six cubits wide,[a] and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. 2 He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. 3 So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it**. King Nebuchadnezzar was very powerful. He was the ruler over many people even of different languages. Out of pride and to be seen as the only powerful one, he made an image of gold that was about 27 meters tall, and 3 meters wide. It was an imposing image, and everyone within the influence of the kingdom of Babylon were commanded to attend to the dedication of this large image. This image was magnificent, awesome and caught the eyes of those who looked at it. Coupled with the command of the powerful king at the time, it seemed extremely difficult to not bow to the image of gold set up. As a result, everyone bowed to the image of gold. Even influential people came to worship this image; the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates.

Look at verse 4 – 6. **4 Then the herald loudly proclaimed, “Nations and peoples of every language, this is what you are commanded to do: 5 As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. 6 Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.”** The herald stepped forward and proclaimed that everyone, at the sound of this magnificent music, should fall down and worship the image of gold. He also gave a stern warning to those who would not obey this command; they were to be thrown into the burning furnace. **7 Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the nations and peoples of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up**. As soon as the music sounded, they were all terrified, and bowed down to the image of gold.

While all the people worshiped the image of gold, a complaint was brough to the attention of the king. Let us read verses 8 – 12. **8 At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. 9 They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, “May the king live forever! 10 Your Majesty has issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, 11 and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. 12 But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up.”** This was a very serious complaint. We understand that any king’s authority is to the extent of his word being obeyed. However, there were three men who disobeyed the command of the king. These men were serving under the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar, as administrators over the affairs of the province of Babylon. I mean the king gave them a job, and taught them of the ways of Babylon. Instead of killing them along with their people of Israel, the king brought them in and took care of them to serve in the palace. They were well taken care of; plenty of food to eat, wine to drink, given top jobs, and even accommodation. Life was good under King Nebuchadnezzar. Why bite the hand that feeds them. How ungrateful, one would think.

All these would have tempted them to worship the image of gold. It is just for one day, and only this one time. Many would have tried to justify themselves, “In my heart I serve the Lord God. This image is worthless, not living, just to keep the peace and preserve my life, let me just bow only this time”. But they did not.

Why? It is because they feared the Lord God Almighty. To fear God means to remain true and faithful to God and His ways regardless of the costs. To fear God means to remain obedient to God as our King even in the face of danger, or the risk to lose our peace and livelihood. To fear God means to not compromise against God, even if it means going against our will and plan.

The Lord commanded the Israelites, Exodus 20:4 – 5b **4 “You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. 5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God**. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego remembered this commandment of God, and instead of obeying the powerful king Nebuchadnezzar, they chose to obey the Almighty God; the creator of the heavens and earth; and that is in them. They could fear God because they knew the One even greater than king Nebuchadnezzar. Yes, their defiance to king Nebuchadnezzar would come with serious consequences of losing their comfortable lives, and livelihood, even losing their very own lives. Yet, when they focused on the Almighty God who is above all, they could keep their faith and remain faithful to God. When they reminded themselves about who God is, they could overcome the compromise of bowing to the image of gold. This compromise has a far greater spiritual cost. While is seems so easy to do on the naked human eye, worshipping this image of gold meant spiritual death as they are cut off from the Lord God. They couldn’t afford being cut off from God; the source of life, just for the sake bowing to this image. They couldn’t risk losing their eternal life, just for the sake a momentary worship of the image of gold. So, the refused to bow.

How did the king react to their defiance? Look at verses 13 – 15. **13 Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, 14 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? 15 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?”** The king was furious! Yet, he gave them another chance to worship the image of gold. But still, they didn’t bow. Against all these threats and serious implication to their lives, Shadrach, Meshack and Abednego remained resolute in keeping their faith and honouring only the Lord God.

Let us all read, and listen to what they said. Look at verse 16 – 18. **16 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, “King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. 17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us[c] from Your Majesty’s hand. 18 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.”** Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego realised that they didn’t need to defend themselves. They didn’t need to make up cleverly worded arguments for not worshiping the image of gold. Rather, they believed that the very same God would defend them. We are often discouraged and made to bow to image of gold in our lives because we think there is no better way out of this. We learn from these three that no matter how impossible it is to fear God, no matter what the great cost it is to obey God, no matter the discomforts and doubts one might have for choosing to honour God, these three believed that God would help them.

So, what is our duty? Our duty is to worship and obey the only true and living God, and the rest shall be handled by His able and mighty hand. Our responsibility is actively deny bowing to the demands of this ungodly world, to repent from always choosing the easy way out, but to fear and worship God only, even in the midst of these challenges. May the Lord encourage our hearts today, and give them strength when we chose to fear Him. Amen!

What happened to these three when they gave this outstanding speech? Where they spared from the fire and all the sufferings that come? No, look at verse 19 -21. **19 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 20 and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. 21 So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace**. Things escalated, the kings attitude towards them changed for they disobeyed his command. They were thrown in the fire. The furnace was so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Eventually, they too fell into the blazing furnace.

However, something amazing happened. God delivered these three men who resolved to rather obey and worship the living God instead of the image of gold. Look at verses 24 – 25. **24 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.” 25 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.”** The Lord God is able to deliver us, not that He removes us from the fire, but that He is with us in the fire. The Lord is able to deliver us, not that he removes all sorts of sufferings from our lives, but that He is with us even in those sufferings.

Look at verses 26 – 27. **26 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, 27 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**. One of the biggest obstacles in obeying God is actually the pain of having to go through sufferings. We do not like sufferings at all. However, I see a purpose of sufferings for those who fear and worship the Lord God. It is to experience the helping hand of God. Now, even though the fire is meant to burn us, we are not burned at all, rather we are saved by the presence of God in those sufferings. While people tend to fold in, bow and compromise because of the fear of sufferings, now we are no longer slaves to the fear of sufferings because we know the One who is able to comfort us in our sufferings.

In conclusion.

This act of worship; the act of refusing to bow to the image of gold brought so much glory to the Lord God, and everyone got to know how great is the God of Meshack, Shadrach and Abednego. **28 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. 29 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.”** In this manner, the Lord God was acknowledged as the only true God. There was much glory to the Lord that these men chose to worship God, even at the great cost of their lives. There was so much glory to the Lord as these men proved that indeed the Lord God is worthy of our worship, and there is no one and nothing above Him. God was glorified through the lives of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego: they were not only strengthened in their faith through this call of obedience, but also blessed in their practical lives as well as they were promoted in the province of Babylon.

I personally thank God for this message, that the Lord is able to deliver and help me in ways beyond my understanding, and the glaring fears. I want to honour God with my life, especially my marriage. I have many fears; meeting the wrong lady, also my bad financial. It seems it would take a mountain and a half to overcome these fears. I don’t want problems, I want peace. I do not want to see myself having to go through what my mother and father went through. They are both unmarried, yet separated. So, I calculate a lot, with the hope that I will meet the right person and have a successful marriage. But these calculations leave me wearied and drained especially when I see how powerless I am.

I need to trust God who is able to help me. I need to obey God through marriage, and repent from my self-sufficiency. I learn that even if there might be issues of lack or fears meeting the wrong lady in my eyes. I am comforted that the Lord is with me, and will guide me. That is enough, and my victory on its own.

Please pray for me that through this message, I be delivered from self-sufficiency, and the fear of the unknown when I marry by faith. Please pray for me to be a man who fears God through obedience of His word, and keeping up with daily repentance.