

“Courage in Babylon” // Daniel 3 // *Shining in Babylon #3*

Daniel 3: You may not recognize the name of **Desmond Doss**, but you may have seen the movie about his life, *Hacksaw Ridge*. Doss was drafted into the U.S. Army in WW2, but he was a pacifist and interpreted the Bible in a way that wouldn't allow him to carry a gun. But he also loved his country and wanted to serve it so he accepted the draft and joined a squadron as a medic. As depicted in the movie, his pacifism made him the target of all kinds of ridicule. But then, one evening, he was serving as a field medic in Okinawa when the Japanese pinned his unit down on top of a cliff and cut down nearly every man. Many of the men were only wounded however, but Doss knew that if they stayed wounded overnight they would die. But high up on the cliff, the wounded men were not accessible to rescue units, and anybody who tried to come up to the cliff would be shot down by the Japanese. So Doss rigged up a stretcher that could be lowered by a series of ropes and pulleys to the ground below and then, by himself and crawling under withering sniper fire, he retrieved every wounded soldier in his unit one at a time and lowered them to safety below. President Truman, recognized Doss as one of the bravest warriors of WW2, claiming that seventy-five men owed their lives solely to his courage, and Truman did something never before done; he awarded Doss the medal of honor to a man who never picked up a gun.

Great things in the world are only accomplished through courage. Lots of people have great intentions; they only come to pass through courage. **How many of you think of yourselves as naturally courageous people?** That's not me. I'm usually the “Veronica, did you hear that noise downstairs? You should go check it out” guy. Or, even better yet, act like I'm still asleep to see if she'll go do it on her own. For most of us, courage is something we have to learn, to develop.

What we're going to see in Daniel 3 is that courage is an **essential quality of those who would shine in Babylon**. Daniel 3 contains one of the Bible's most famous stories. In it, we see the soul of Christian courage-- both its substance and the fuel that sustains it. It's the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, or as I prefer: Rack, Shack, and Benny. Here's what I'm going to show you: **Courage = Confession + Conviction**

Da3:1 King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits...
2 Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather... all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that he had set up. 4 And the herald proclaimed aloud, “You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, (important phrase!) 5 that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, (the keytar, the kazoo, the harmonica, Hammond B3 organ and the hammered dulcimers) ~~and every kind of music,~~ you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. 6 And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace.”

Now, we have to notice that ol' Neb is a little hard-headed. Do you remember the substance of Neb's dream in chapter 2? He saw a gigantic statue that had a head of gold that represented him and a body of silver, bronze, iron and then clay that represented other earthly kingdoms that would conquer his; and then, a stone made without hands came from heaven and smashed the statute into a billion pieces. The stone, Daniel explained,

Works consulted:

“Daniel 3,” Steven Furtick

Preaching Christ in Daniel, “Daniel's Friends in the Fiery Furnace,” Sidney Griedanus

“No Smell of Fire,” Beth Moore

“Standing in Babylon,” Bryan Loritts

“The King and the Furnace,” Tim Keller

“Thriving in Babylon,” Larry Osborne

was Jesus, who would abolish all earthly Kingdoms erected in independence of him and establish his own. Chapter 2 ended with Nebuchadnezzar responding, in amazement 2:47 "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." But here, as chapter 3 opens, Neb's got a 90 foot statue of himself, gold from top to bottom, requiring everyone bow down to it. Not only has he forgotten the lesson from the dream, he's made it worse! The fact that it's gold from top to bottom means he thinks his kingdom is going to last forever, and it is the most important thing on earth." So, for Nebuchadnezzar, this is kind of a round 2 between him and God.

And please note, if you will, the phrase in vs. 4: "all the peoples, nations, and languages." That's a very important phrase in the Bible, indicating something epic is about to take place. You see, the last time all the nations had been all together in one place was In Genesis 11, where the human race had united in setting up a tower declaring their independence from God, called the Tower of Babel. And God had immediately, in mercy, scattered them into different "peoples, nations and languages." And then, immediately in the next chapter, God called Abraham and promised to 'make of him a great nation' that would bless all the peoples of the earth and bring them back together in unity around the throne of the Messiah. The fulfillment of this is in the book of Revelation, when John looks and sees a vast throng of people, that no man can number, from "every tribe, tongue, and people on earth," gathered around the throne of God proclaiming, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain!" But here, in Daniel 3, we have Nebuchadnezzar, a usurper, attempting to bring the nations back together, united around HIS greatness. And, here's the irony: *He's doing it on the exact same spot the Tower of Babel had been.* The point is: This is an epic battle. It's not a sideshow kind of the primary battle of the whole history of the human race!

So, how does it go down? Well, Vs. 7, all the instruments start to play and everyone bows down. We're not exactly sure how many were there that day; many scholars say it would have been close to a million people. So, imagine for a moment this scene. You've seen Middle Eastern people bow down. Faces to the ground; rear ends in the air. *A million people bowed down in homage except... What is that? About 200 yards back. It's 3 men--no, 3 teenage BOYS. Are those the Hebrews?"* And there they are, S,M, and A; standing--awkwardly, maybe a little nervously, but bolt upright with everyone else around them on their faces.

Now, I know some you may ask, "Uhh... Where is Daniel?" Good question. It's unlikely he's having a moment of lapsed faith and bowing down. Some have speculated Daniel was out traveling on business, but I think a better answer is found in the last verse of Daniel 2. Daniel 2:49 says that Daniel was put on the King's Court, which means he would have been exempt from participating in this display. If he were anywhere in this scene, he would have been up on the stage!

Da3:13 Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king. 14 Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, "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? I'll tell you what. I'll give you another chance. This time, when you hear the sound of... 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?"

I love how the 3 teenage Hebrew boys answer ol' Neb. Rack, Shack and Benny: said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. (IOW, we don't need to talk about it or deliberate. Our minds are made up; there's only one thing to do) **17 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.** And then I love these next words.

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." Wow. Literally everything you need to know about Christian courage is in those 3 verses.

1. Courage's Confession: Jesus is the Only Lord

I have a theory as to why Nebuchadnezzar was so ticked off right here. Remember how chapter 2 ended? Neb had ended the chapter **2:47** by acknowledging their God! So, it seems only fair that they acknowledge his.

It was not their faith in God that caused the problem. It was their refusal to ALSO acknowledge the divine authority of Nebuchadnezzar that caused the problem.

Hear this, nothing has changed today: **In our Babylon, faith in Jesus is not the problem.** It's our insistence that he's the only way of salvation and only source of authority that is.

You will never get in trouble for saying that Jesus is your personal Savior. But you will when you say that there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved and that he alone sets the rules about what is right and not right about sex, marriage, morality and money.

Our society says, for example, "You are free to get married in the traditional way if you want, and you can even reserve sex for the marriage bed, and be abstinent until then, if that's your thing, but how dare you label someone else's choices sin? How dare you not bow down to my sexual preferences? How dare you not prostrate yourself during my pride week, affirming that my way is just as valid as Jesus'? And if you don't do this, our culture will punish you. It may not be throwing you in a fiery furnace right now, but businesses will boycott you, or take things like the NCAA tournament or the All Star game if you don't conform. It's the same old spirit of Nebuchadnezzar at work in our day.

- We all know of small businesses that have been sued out of business for refusing to participate in ceremonies and practices they found objectionable. In very few of my readings about these things did the person do it rudely, or bigotedly; they just said, "Listen, I respect your right as a free citizen to do this, but I'd ask you to respect my right to not be involved in it personally since it goes against my convictions." But because they wouldn't bow, they were sued and shut down.

- One of President Biden’s advisors has indicated that if this Equality Act is passed, which mandates societal acceptance of these things, then religious organizations and churches who don’t honor it in their own practices could face substantial tax penalties, even fines.¹

You can have your Christian convictions, but keep them in the closet! Because the moment you fail to bow down in homage where you are supposed to, the fiery furnace awaits.

Or, so you won’t think I’m picking on the political left, let me come at it from another angle. Some in our society, “How dare you criticize America or imply that America will be judged for its sins? America is special. Chosen by God. And if a strong man with a history of abusive and misogynistic behavior is good for America, who are you to question his integrity? If he’s good for America, God is on his side.” IOW, you’re fine to bow to Jesus; just make sure you bow to my guy, too.

Our society says that we are fine to say that Jesus is your Savior, but how dare you say that Jesus is the only way to heaven?

- **Oprah:** “There are certainly many more paths to God other than Christianity. I’m a free-thinking Christian who believes in my way, but with 6 billion people here on the planet, it can’t possibly be the only way.”² What kind of backwards person are you, believing that there’s only one way to God?
- A few years ago **the Dean at Stanford University** forced a group of Christian students to stop proselytizing others on campus. He said, *You are fine to be Christians and to gather together weekly to worship. But you are not allowed to try to convince others that they can only be saved through Jesus*, for (and I quote) “all faiths are equally valid as religions.” It’s fine to worship Jesus, but you still need to bow to the statue of pluralism or our version of the fiery furnace.

So see, human society today is just like it was in Nebuchadnezzar’s day. They are fine with our practicing any Christian teaching so long as we still bow where we are supposed to bow. What they want us to have is an edited faith, an edited Bible.

- **In the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, DC**, there’s an old Bible that belonged to Thomas Jefferson. It is the most fascinating thing because large sections of it are just cut out. You see, in Jefferson’s day, the academic world had turned against any kind of belief in miracles. That was considered unfashionable, uneducated. But these Enlightenment thinkers thought the morality of Jesus was awesome--the Sermon on the Mount, they thought, was the greatest moral treatise in human history. But the miracles--those are just a leftover relic of a superstitious, medieval past. So, **Thomas Jefferson** literally cut out every supernatural passage in the New Testament so he could have a Bible with just Jesus’ moral teachings.

¹ <https://albertmohler.com/2021/02/08/briefing-2-8-21>

² There's a pretty famous clip from Oprah's show where Oprah is confronting several women in her audience (all of whom are trying to say that Jesus is the only way). Oprah's response is clearly exasperated: "One of the mistakes that human beings make is in saying there's only one way to live—and we don't accept that there are diverse ways of being, millions of ways, many paths to what you call God. There can't be only one way. There couldn't POSSIBLY be. Does God care about the heart or does God care if you call Jesus his son?"

- **Across the Mall, in Bible Museum**, you have the slaveholders Bible with all the sections cut out that would slaves to think they were equal...
- If someone did this today they would probably cut out Jesus' teachings on the sanctity of sex and marriage. They'd keep the miracle stories and cut out large parts of the Sermon on the Mount.

Again, our culture says it is fine to worship Jesus, just edit him to fit our preferences so you can still bow where you need to bow. **But, hear me: for the follower of Jesus, that's not an option.** He is Lord. And as we often say, "If he's not Lord of all, he's not Lord at all." Coming to Jesus is not like signing one of those rental car contracts where you can leave off certain options. You know how when you are signing for the car they ask you all these questions: *Do you want navigation? Prepaid fuel? Prepaid tolls? A ridiculously overpriced insurance package that will give you a 0 deductible if the space station falls out of orbit onto your car?* I was renting a car in OK and the guy said, "For \$18/day if you get this insurance it will cover you for anything, even flood damage." I asked, "Does that happen a lot here?" The point is, I get to say, "No, I don't want that, I'll take that." People think they can do that with Jesus. We can "accept the parts of him" we want and postpone the others till later. I heard one college girl explain one time that she had accepted Jesus as Savior now and planned to accept him as Lord later. I was like, "You can't bifurcate Jesus." He's either Lord or he is not. You're either fully surrendered to him or living in rebellion.

If God is the only God, and he's the only one who can save and the only revealer of mysteries, **for us to not make that clear is not just cowardly, it is cruel.**

Time for a classic story: Bertha: Glad the pilot of this airplane doesn't look at the landing this plane like you do salvation. **Open minded, free thinking pilot...** put her down in the Walmart parking lot, try to balance her nose tip first on the top of the PNC building... I'm glad he pursues landing this airplane safely in the narrow way the **control tower has prescribed.** **Campbell/Harvard.** If Jesus is the only way, then whether or not people make it **safely** into eternity depends on our courage to tell the truth.

Because **these guys stood when everyone else bowed, even** though they got thrown into a fiery furnace for it, **an entire Empire** got to see the reality of the God of Israel on display. **Scholars say that ultimately you can trace the faith of the wise men** who came to see Jesus at his birth back to this encounter.

What will future generations say about the courage, and the testimony, of this generation? Because literally, friend, their eternal future depends on our courage in the present.

That's courage!

2. Courage's Conviction: I Believe That God Can, Expect That He Will, But Trust Him If He Doesn't³

³ I owe this wording a message I heard years ago by Steven Furtick at Elevation Church!

Let's unpack that one phrase at a time:

Christian courage... Believes that God can. The first thing I notice from their answer is that these 3 Hebrew teenage boys are in no doubt about who the biggest daddy in this little drama is. **vs. 17: "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the fiery furnace."** All the other million people out there on the plain are thinking, "Look how small and piddly those 3 teenagers look next to Nebuchadnezzar and all his mighty soldiers." And they are thinking, "Look how puny lil' ol' Neb looks next to God."

This is where courage begins. God is bigger. He's bigger than your problems. I remember the hymn I learned as a kid that helped me not be afraid at night: *God is bigger than the boogiemán; He's bigger than Godzilla or the monsters on TV; Oh, God is bigger than the boogiemán; And he's watching out for you and me.*

That's it. That's the most basic principle of faith. God is bigger than your problems. Any of them. He's bigger than cancer or a lost job. He's bigger than a broken marriage. He's bigger than your friends. He's bigger than your sin. Bigger than your shame. Bigger than the grave. And if you are his child, nothing happens to you without his permission. Not even a hair from your head falls apart from his knowledge or permission. So why, the hymn-writer asks, should I feel discouraged? Why should the shadows come? For JESUS is my portion. My constant friend is he, his eye is on the sparrow, and I know he watches me." **Christian courage believes that he can.** Say to your neighbor: *"I believe that he can."*

Christian courage... Expects that he will. Notice their words in **vs. 17 "...and he will deliver us out of your hand, O King."** How did they know that? (Little secret). They didn't. You see that in the next phrase **(v. 18) "But if not..."** They didn't know how this was going to turn out. They had no direct promise, no huddle where God pulled them aside and told them how it was going to go down. But they had this suspicion in their heart that God would deliver them because they understood God's goodness and his willingness to showcase the glory of his name.

Can I tell you a little secret? Many of the great feats of faith in your Bible were not done in response to a direct command of God or with a promised guarantee of how it would turn out.

I'll give you just one example: **1 Sam 14.** The Philistines were oppressing Israel and they have taken away all their swords. There are only 2 swords in the whole country and Jonathan, King Saul's son, has one, when he comes up on a garrison of 20 Philistines. It's just him and his armor bearer. Two guys, with one sword between them, and 20 armed Philistine soldiers. **6 Jonathan said to his young armor-bearer, "Come, let's go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised men. Perhaps the Lord will act in our behalf."** "Perhaps?" If I'm that armor bearer without a sword, I'm like, "Bro, if you're trying to persuade me to attack 20 men and I ain't even got a sword, you got to do better than 'perhaps.'" Am I right? Jonathan just "expected" that God would glorify his name.

Doesn't Jonathan's words sound like what David, Jonathan, says in **Ps. 27:13, "I am convinced I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."** Not just rewards in heaven, in the sweet by and by after we're all dead, but I expect to see you breaking into my life, my family, my friends, my ministry NOW with the evidences of your goodness.

Think about how many of the miracles of Jesus came about because someone, without a promise or without a plan, took a dare on Jesus' goodness? Think of the woman with the blood disease who came up behind Jesus, thinking that if she could just touch the hem of his garment she'd be healed. Luke makes very clear that Jesus was not planning for this; he was busily on his way somewhere else and this woman seemed the farthest thing from his earthly mind. And then, unexpectedly, she reached out, audaciously, taking a dare on his goodness. And Jesus said, "I've scarcely seen faith like this anywhere. Your boldness in taking a dare on my goodness is rewarded." And he healed her.

Bold faith doesn't just believe that he can; bold faith expects that he will. (And, of course, this is not to say that God is like a magic genie lamp whom, if you rub him the right way, he will give you what you want. Sometimes God, in his goodness, tells us no or tells us to wait. It's just to say that here in this story, as we see multiple times throughout the Bible, God rewards those who take a dare on his goodness, who "expect that he will.")

So, my question for you: **Where do you need to take a dare on God?**

- Reaching out to share your faith at work or at school (even though it's awkward)
- Maybe taking a courageous stand at work, even though it looks like it will cost you big in the short run
- Or, if you serve in politics, standing for what is right, even though the media and sometimes your own party throws you in the fiery furnace every time you do!
- Maybe it's persevering in a prayer request... believing God's goodness will break in...
- Maybe submitting the application to foster, (even though you're scared about how it'll change your life)
- How about boldly choosing to keep the kid (even though you're young and pregnant and you feel alone) or choosing to keep pressing on in the marriage even though it's difficult
- Maybe it's calling that estranged family member (even though you aren't sure how they'll respond to your offer of forgiveness)
- Or confessing your pornography habit to a trusted friend (even though you'd rather keep it concealed)
- Starting a ministry. We've done it at TSC with a goal of 1000 church plants, years ago when God put it in our heart to reach college students, even though they came with no money (check for 186K)
- Maybe it's in a financial gift God is putting in your heart to make but it scares you to death!

Will you take a dare? Everybody look at your neighbor and say, "I'm not sure, but I expect that he will."

Finally, **Christian courage... Trusts him if he doesn't**

And now, the greatest words in the story: **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.** Like I said, some of my favorite words in the OT. Even if he doesn't deliver us, and he might let us die in the furnace, be clear, O Neb, that we'd rather die in the flames with just him than live in a palace with just you.

They believed God was not only big enough to protect them from Neb; they believed that knowing him was better than anything they'd ever have to give up.

Want to write stuff down? Courage believes not only that God is **BIGGER** than the opposition but also **BETTER** than all alternatives.

You see, here's the thing: Sometimes you take a stand and God delivers, like Jonathan, and David. And sometimes you take a stand and he lets you suffer, like Jesus did. The question you have to ask is, "If he lets you go into the fire, is he enough for you?" You see, the **ONLY** way you'll have the courage to suffer for what is right is if you believe knowing Jesus is **ENOUGH**.

MUSIC

Let me show you from this story why he is ENOUGH--and not just for these 3 Hebrew teenagers, but for you, too. In this story is a promise directly for you: 19 Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated. And they threw them in. It was so hot, the next verse says, that the heat coming from the furnace's mouth killed the soldiers who carried the bound teenagers up to throw them in. So, Neb expected to see them burst immediately into flames. But 24 Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king." 25 He answered and said, "But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt (In other words, the only thing that burned was their chains); and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods."

- From our perspective after the NT, it's pretty safe to say that it WAS the Son of God.

26 Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace; he declared, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here!" (and they came out) 27 and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them.

There was a 4th man in the fire with them, and because of that, they came out of the flame totally unharmed. Stay with me: This whole scene prefigures Jesus going through the cross—Jesus was thrown into the fires of judgment with us. And because he did, we came through judgment totally unharmed.

- There is therefore no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. The hair on our head is not singed with judgment; our clothes are not burned. He took the flame so we could emerge in safety, not a trace of judgment anywhere on our bodies or even our clothes. Only the ropes of our bondage to sin burned away!

And what that means is this: If he went into the ultimate fires of judgment for you--the cross, and he kept us totally safe and free from harm there, don't you think he'll keep you in whatever lesser fires you go into now?

The God who died for you in the fire is the God who can keep you in the fire

A friend of mine says: *"Don't search for a faith that will keep you from the fire, but for a God that will keep you in the fire."*⁴The presence of Jesus was with these 3 Hebrew teenagers in their furnace, and his presence will be with you in any furnace into which he puts you, also. Again: **The God who died for you in the fire is the God who can keep you in the fire.**

Let me show you how this whole thing ends: 28 Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, "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. 29 Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of sShadrach, 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."

The story ends with Nebuchadnezzar commanding all peoples, nations, and languages to gather in unified worship of God's power to save. It's a picture of the future. 'And I looked, (the Apostle John said) and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes (that means unsinged and unharmed) and were holding palm branches in their hands. 10 And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

The world will not be unified by the greatness of some earthly Kingdom--Babylon or Great Britain or America or otherwise--but by a Savior who went into the flame of judgment for his people and kept them 100% safe from all harm. And we will help move the world to that worship by determining to bow only to Jesus as Lord and get up every day believing that he can, expecting that he will, and trusting him if he doesn't.

PRAYER

- Are you wavering in your testimony about Jesus?
- Where are you taking a dare on God's goodness?

⁴ You see, the furnace imagery is used throughout the Bible as a picture of trials. Egypt was called the "furnace" of suffering; Isa referred to the entire Babylonian exile as a "furnace of adversity." The Apostle Peter referred to believers going through a furnace of affliction. 1 Peter 1:7

