

Lake Cities Community Church  
July 20, 2008  
Pastor Craig Schill  
Book of Daniel

**“Even If He Does Not”**  
Daniel 3

In C.S. Lewis' book "*The Last Battle*" from *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Tash is the false god of the Calormen. Tash is of demonic origin. He is described as having a skeletal, humanoid body, a vulture-like head and four taloned arms. Tash delights in human sacrifice and is evil. However, in the book an Ape named Shift makes the claim that Tash and Aslan are one and the same. This claim confuses the people of Narnia – after all Aslan has been gone a long time! The Ape tells the people:

Listen! Tash is only another name for Aslan. All that old idea of us being right and the Calormenes wrong is silly. We know better now. The Calormenes use different words but we all mean the same thing. Tash and Aslan are only two different names for you know Who. That's why there can never be any quarrel between them...Tash is Aslan: Aslan is Tash.

Lewis articulates a popular belief today that when it comes to religion many people believe they are all basically the same. A 19<sup>th</sup> century Hindu said: "I say that all are calling on the same God...it is not good to feel that my religion is true and the other religions are false. All seek the same object. A mother prepares dishes to suit the stomachs of her children....God has made religions to suit different aspirants, times and countries.." - Ramakrishna. That is what our culture believes.

More recently, George Bush was asked about whether the war in Iraq was a statement against the religion of Islam. Bush said: "I believe in an Almighty God, and I believe that all the world, whether they be Muslim, Christian, or any other religion, prays to the same God. That's

what I believe.” After receiving negative responses from Christians – the White House put out this statement: “Bush is not a theologian.”

Where you consider yourself a theologian or not – at some point you have to decide whether the God revealed in the Bible is the true God – or whether He can co-exist with other gods or religions. A great place to research this very issue is in the book of Daniel. It is highlighted today as we will see. Please take out your Bibles and turn to Daniel chapter 3, as we work our way through chapters 1-6.

### **Golden Image Set Up (v1)**

Our story today begins: “**Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold.**” (1). It is probably an idol of Marduk or Nebo. This extremely large statue is 90 feet tall and 9 feet wide and entirely covered in gold! The Christ The Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro is also 90-feet tall – and you can see that this was an impressive structure. The statue is set up “**in the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.**” Archeologists believe they have actually found this site and the pedestal this statue rested on about 4 miles south of Babylon. And so the statue is made, set up and now, verses 2-7, it needed to be dedicated.

### **Dedication Ceremony (2-7)**

I remember several years ago, when I worked at NAU, I attended a statue dedication ceremony. The statue was of a Navajo Code Talker, by the famous Navajo artist R.C. Gorman. It was kind of a dramatic event – the statue was shrouded. The dignitaries are assembled. The major of the town was there, the president of the University. There was a program with music and dancing. Then at the peak of the program the veil was lifted and behold the statue!

The same thing is happening here (though a much bigger deal!). Verses 2, 3 and 4 detail that all the dignitaries were present – verse 2: “the satraps, the prefects, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the rulers.” The long list and the repetition of the list is a literary device to highlight the importance of the occasion – Anyone who is anyone is there. They all came, (2) “to the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.” This phrase – that Nebuchadnezzar set up is intentionally repeated in the text – six times. It is not only an important event – it is the King’s event – intended to glorify him.

The dedication program is described, verse 5: “at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar has set up – but whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire. The penalty seems a bit harsh to us – thrown into a furnace, but we know from history that the Babylonians did (at times) burn up their enemies. The furnace is there because it was used to make the bricks and melt the gold. Nebuchadnezzar had it lit before the even so that as people gathered they saw the fire and the smoke and knew this was not an idol threat. In verse 7 the orchestra is cued – the people bow – the program is over – let’s go home – get back to work.

### **Charges Brought Forward (8-12)**

Except... verse 8 “Certain Chaldeans (astrologers) came forward and brought charges against the Jews.” Not just any Jews, Verse 12 they say: (12) “There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the administration of the province of Babylon, namely Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. These men, O King, have disregarded you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up.”

Probably these astrologers were jealous of their rise to power. If you have ever been passed over for a promotion by someone with less seniority – you can empathize with their anger and bitterness toward the three upstarts – this is their chance to get even.

### **Turn or Burn (13-18)**

So, verse 13, Nebuchadnezzar has them brought to him – and in public view asks (14) “Is it true, 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, at the moment you hear (the music), fall down and worship the image that I have made.” It is the moment of decision. Aslan or Tash? Marduk or Yahweh. Turn or burn! Can’t we all get along here? Can you stop the embarrassment please? Won’t you bow down? Can you imagine the peer pressure on them to bow - especially now – with every eye on them and the king asking them personally.

But they do not turn from their convictions. I wonder if they were thinking of the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment: (Ex. 20:4-5) “You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me.”

And do they respond to the king. Their response is one of my favorite verses in all the Bible. You should underline it, memorize it, highlight it and live by it. It is profound and provides the answer to many of your questions about how to interpret God’s work in the world today. They said (17) “If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O King. But even if he does not, let it be known to you, O King, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden

image that you have set up.” We often do not have a dream or vision or specific word from God about the future – so we obey and leave the future to him – We accept God’s will, whatever it is, by faith.

### **Execution Carried Out (19-23)**

And so Nebuchadnezzar is publically embarrassed and shamed by their refusal to bow, he (19) “was filled with wrath and his facial expression was altered... He answered by giving orders to heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated.” When the furnace was heated - the Jews were immediately tied up and thrown in. Things were done so hastily that (23) “the fire slew those men who carried up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, but these three men...fell into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire.”

### **Divine Protection (24-27)**

They did the right thing - they rejected the statue and obeyed the True God. But, can you imagine the horror of being bound and lifted and thrown into a furnace. God did not stop the process of execution. The King thought that He had won – the mother’s covered the eyes of their children. It was horrible, but at least it was over.

And then Nebuchadnezzar says the most silly thing of the day, “Was it not three men we cast bound into the midst of the furnace?” Ah, yes. (25) “Look! (he says) I see four men loosed and walking about in the midst of the fire without hard and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods!”

*God does not protect them from the furnace – he protects them in the furnace.*

Whether the fourth person was an angel or Jesus himself – we don't know. But he doesn't come out with the three men – as Nebuchadnezzar calls them out as he and the nation witness complete divine protection.

### **Glory and Blessing (28-30)**

Everyone has forgotten about the 90-foot statue that at this point. Its height and its shiny gold are a distant memory. Everyone in the plain of Dura that day hears Nebuchadnezzar shout - **“Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent His angel and delivered His servants who put their trust in Him, violating the king's command and yielded up their bodies so as not to serve or worship any god except their own God.”** God is glorified and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are further blessed.

### **Application**

Four questions to leave us with from the text. **First** – Are you ready to trust and obey in the clear teaching of Scripture – not matter the cost? This is a story of “trust and obey.” The 10 commandments were clear on what to do – no room for compromise or rationalization. How about you – the Bible is clear on many things – do not lie, steal, deceive one another. Do not hold bitterness in your heart – do not lust. Do good to all men. Pray for your enemies. Trust and obey – no matter what.

**Second**, The second question is – Are you prepared to take a public and unpopular stand for Christ – either by yourself or with a select group of friends? If you are a teenager, what if your faith is challenged on Facebook? If God is ridiculed? Are you ready for a public response? How about at work, At times we have to take uncomfortable and public stands for God in our daily lives.

**Third**, Do you have the courage to add “even if He does not” to your prayers and perspective of God? Parents – you pray for your children – to live long lives, to get married, or stay close to the faith – But what if they don’t? You have a friend with cancer and you pray for her healing. But what if God doesn’t choose to heal? I love our church and pray I will be here many years and that we will grow and eventually get a building – but what if that doesn’t happen? Are you ready for “even if He does not” theology? Can you praise God regardless of whether your dreams work out the way you want them to? What a challenge this is to us.

**Fourth** and last – Do you believe that Christianity is the “exclusive” way to find God? Over and over in Daniel – the message is God is the True God – the only God – the rest are powerless before me. Chapter one God verses the meat from the King’s table? God wins. Chapter two: Nebuchadnezzar’s dream about the statue and the stone. God wins. Chapter three. God verses the 90-foot statue and a egomaniac king. God wins.

The point? *It matters whom you serve.* Tash is not Aslan and Aslan is not Tash – There is One God and many false gods. The true God has revealed Himself and He is a jealous God. Jesus said “I am the way the truth and the life – no one comes to the Father except through me.” Like these icons of faith – we must continue to stand out from the crowd – even to the point of death – for the glory of the Most High – the Only true God.