**THEY DEFIED THE KING’S COMMAND**

July 2, 2017

Daniel 3:1-30

Key Verse 3:28b “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.”

We have been studying what it means to live holy and godly lives in the Book of Daniel. In Chapter 1, we learned that a holy and godly life is to keep our identity pure as children of God in Babylon exile-like world. In chapter 2, we learned that a holy and godly life is to overcome fear by faith and live earnest prayer life especially with humble united prayer. In this chapter, we learn that a holy and godly life is not bowing to external pressure to compromise our faith. In this chapter, we meet three young men who defied the king’s command, not bowing to pressure to compromise their faith. Put yourself in the situation. Do we put God first? Do we put his word first? Can we not bow to pressure to compromise like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego? Studdert-Kennedy was a pastor and a chaplain in World War I. He has written some very beautiful poems to his son: “The first prayer I want my son to learn to say for me is not, ‘God, keep Daddy safe.’ The first prayer I want my son to learn is, ‘God, make Daddy brave, and if he has hard things to do, make him strong to do them.’ Life and death don’t matter, my son. Right and wrong do. Daddy dead is Daddy still. But Daddy dishonored before God is something too awful for words.” One poet wrote it this way, “I saw the martyr at the stake, the flames could not his courage shake, nor death his soul appall. I asked him whence his strength was given, he looked triumphantly to heaven and answered, ‘Christ is all.’” That is the heart of the three young Hebrews, and I trust that God will give you that same heart as you learn today from this passage.

About 20 years before, God gave King Nebuchadnezzar a dream concerning an event that would take place in the future. After the dream, God made King Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom prosperous. Then King Nebuchadnezzar completely forgot about God. Again he fell into the illusion that he had made his kingdom and civilization with his own hands. Through Daniel's interpretation of the dream he had heard in the allegory of the statue made of gold, silver, bronze, iron and clay, that God is Sovereign Ruler and worldly kingdoms and civilization are temporal. But King Nebuchadnezzar forgot the main point of the dream: He only remembered Daniel's word that he was the head of gold (2:38b). He was an egocentric person. In his hallucination, he made an image of gold for his own glory. It was ninety feet high and nine feet wide, and he set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar erected such an enormous, awesome image of gold for his name so that he might demonstrate his power and glory before his subjects. The demonstration of his wealth and power through the dedication ceremony of the image of gold was fantastic.

After the image of gold was set up the surrounding area was decorated by specialists from all over the provinces. High up in the center was a golden royal box where King Nebuchadnezzar and his wife were present. One stage lower were several hundred silver royal boxes for his high officials and their wives. On the third stage were several thousand bronze royal boxes for subject kings and their diplomats. Underneath were several thousand chairs lined up for all the dignitaries of all nations of every language. In another corner were several thousand musicians with their instruments. Now the herald loudly proclaimed, “Nations and people of every language, this is what you are commanded to do: As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace” (4b-6).

But Daniel's three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, stood up and did not bow down to the image of gold. They had been appointed as governors of provinces by virtue of Daniel’s recommendation and they worked hard for the king. They knew they were captives from Israel. But they obtained governors’ positions. Yet they loved God more than anything else in the world. When they were successful, the time of faith test came to them. It was whether or not to bow down to the image of gold. At the time of fiery trial, at the time their destiny was flickering like a candle before the wind, they were not gripped with fear because they loved God in their hearts and God was with them. They were ready to obey God’s command not to worship idols: They were ready to refuse the king’s order to bow down to the image of gold. Exodus 20:4-5 says, “You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth below…you shall not bow down to them or worship them.”

Let’s think about what they were doing. Nebuchadnezzar was their benefactor. Their destiny was in his hands. Resisting Nebuchadnezzar would be utterly useless. They have no other resource. Future advancement in their careers in Babylon were absolutely dependent upon their allegiance. They could have said to themselves, “An idol is nothing, anyway, so why do we worry about it? We’ll just kneel down with everybody else, only we’ll pray to the true God. God will understand.” They could have said, “This is a foreign land. We must follow the customs of the land.” As the saying goes, “When in Rome, do as the Romans do.” They could have said, “Well, if we are dead, we cannot help our people in exile.” Or “I am not hurting anybody.” But Daniel’s three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, had a spirit of martyrdom and it was indeed great: It enabled them to die even in the flames of fire.

Look at verse 13-14. “Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego…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?” Have you ever noticed that egomania can’t stand one person that doesn’t conform? One person is all it takes to make them literally livid, let alone three. So Nebuchadnezzar was never satisfied with everybody bowing down but three. Megalomaniacs are never satisfied with anything less than everybody. If you find yourself angered when people don’t follow your directions, ask yourself, “Why am I reacting?” You may be an egomaniac.

What did they answer? Look at verses 16-18. “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.’” This is their confession of faith. This is also their personal life testimony.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego believed their God is Almighty God. So they said, “If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it.” We also must have this basic faith, which is the first step of faith. We must believe that God created heavens and earth with his power and wisdom (Gen 1:1). God made the heavens where there are multi-billions of stars (Gen 1:17). God made the sea where there are multi-billions of fish, enough to feed all mankind to the end (Gen 1:20). The people of Israel had this faith in God Almighty. They believed that God enabled them to make a great Exodus from Egypt (Ex 15:2; Ps 105:37). They believed that God enabled them to cross the Red Sea as on dry land (Ex 15:8; Ps 106:9). They believed that God made Aaron's dried rod sprout, bud and blossom (Num 17:8). Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had this faith.

Look at verse 18 again. “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.” They wanted to honor God even if it cost their lives. They were living according to what Jesus said in Luke 12:4-5, “I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.” Like Job in Job 13:15, they said, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust him.” They knew that what happened to their bodies was not the issue, but that their soul had to stand on the truth of God. We also should live an uncompromising life that will not bow to any idol no matter what the cost. The world comes to us over and over again to call us to its idols: An idol is anything you put before God. It can be the idol of popularity, the idol of comfort, the idol of fame, the idol of respectability in the world: We want to be popular. We want to be famous. We want to be liked. We want to make money. We want to get a promotion. We want to get good grades. We want to win somebody over. And so we compromise and render ourselves useless and our testimony negative. But none of those idols should make us bow. God is just as good when He doesn’t heal as He is when He does. God is just as loving when He doesn’t provide all that we think we need as when He does. God is just as gracious when He says “no” as He is when He says “yes.” God is God, and God is to be uncompromisingly worshiped, and what He does is his business. You might sum it up by saying, in God’s case, death is as good as life. In other words, there is a call for an uncompromising commitment to confess the reality of God and stand true. Martin Luther said on his way to face the inevitable hour of excommunication at what is known as “The Diet of Worms,” “My cause shall be commended to the Lord, for He lives and reigns who preserved the three children in the furnace of the Babylonian king. If He is unwilling to preserve me, my life is a small thing compared with Christ. Expect anything of me except flight or recantation. I will not flee, much less recant, so may the Lord Jesus strengthen me.” Martin Luther inspired by those three Hebrews. He didn’t say, “Deliver me.” He said, “If God wants to take my life, it is a small thing.” So with these great men of God and others, we stand before the presence of the pressure of the world to bow to its idols unflinching and unwavering.

King Nebuchadnezzar was furious because of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. The king’s pride was offended. To the king, what they said was nothing but treason and rebellion, and their testimony shamed King Nebuchadnezzar for the first time in his life. So the king 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. The decision made out of anger brought them disaster. 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.

After throwing Daniel’s three friends into the fire, Nebuchadnezzar thought they were burned to ashes. But when God was with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, they did not die in the flaming fire of the furnace. Only the ropes of the king burned like bits of straw. And they were freed from bondage. When God was with them they could rejoice in God and danced in the flaming fire. Where there is God, there is the Kingdom of God. King Nebuchadnezzar saw that they did not die but were dancing, so the king leaped to his feet in amazement. When he carefully saw them, four men, not three men, were walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth man looked like a son of the gods (25). Here, the fourth man is God in the form of an angel. When Daniel's three friends believed God's almighty power and his love, God came down and was with them in the flaming fire.

Nebuchadnezzar approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, “Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!” (26) So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire and all the officials 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 (27). 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” (28). King Nebuchadnezzar promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

You and I will probably never face a fiery furnace. But we are going to face trial by fire. The world is going to try to force us to compromise. In such a situation, we need to stand firm and absolutely uncompromising. Let me give you one example. Stephen Girard, the unbelieving millionaire of Philadelphia, told his clerks one Saturday that they had to come the next day and unload a shipment which had just arrived. One young man stepped up to the desk and said nervously, “Mr. Girard, I can’t work on Sunday.” “Well, sir,” replied Mr. Girard, “if you can’t do as I wish, you will be fired.” “I know that, sir,” said the young man. “And I know, too, that I have a widowed mother to care for, but I cannot work on Sunday.” “Very well,” said Mr. Girard, “you are fired.” After three long weeks, a bank president asked Girard to name a suitable person for cashier of a new bank about to be started. After reflecting a moment, Girard named the young man he had just fired. “But I thought you fired him,” said the bank president. “I did,” retorted Girard, “because he wouldn’t work on Sunday. And I tell you, the man who will lose his job on account of principle is the man with whom you can trust your money.”

Living a holy and godly life is to live uncompromising life even in the face of death. May God help us to overcome the world by our uncompromising life.