

WHAT'S GOD'S BIG IDEA?

DANIEL 3:13-30 OCTOBER 17, 2018

Daniel chapter 3, verse 13 is where we'll begin this evening. Here's a question for everyone: What's your idea of a great vacation? Some people want to sit on a beach and do nothing, others want to stay busy with lots of activities. Some want to see famous cities like Rome or Paris, others imagine remote wilderness high on a mountain somewhere.

I know something that probably *didn't* make anyone's list, and that's the experience of over 160 guests at a 5 star hotel in the Dominican Republic back in 2013. They were there, experiencing a pricey vacation, while the hotel simultaneously ran a cheap, all-inclusive package for locals only. Hundreds of locals showed up, got drunk, ate *all* the food in the restaurants, destroyed things, defecated in the pool and urinated on sunbathing guests. Five days into his 2 week vacation, Tony Walton, who had paid \$15,000 for his trip, was told he could be moved to another hotel...for \$2,300! After organizing a two day sit-in protest with 100 other guests at the hotel, they were eventually transported to another spot and given a \$40 reimbursement.¹ Not my idea of a vacation.

Bad vacations are no fun while you're on them, but they usually make for a good story once you're back.

We have before us this evening one of the great stories of the Old Testament. A story of faith and triumph, of God's glory and deliverance. But, before we dive in, let me ask you this: What is *your* idea of deliverance? The idea of God intervening and saving is central to our faith. It's even part of what we call the Lord's prayer. "Lead us not into temptation but *deliver us* from evil." So, how would you *define* deliverance?

In our text, God's faithful servants were in some real trouble. There, at the great dedication service of Nebuchadnezzar's blasphemous image, they refused to bow in worship. Now they faced immediate, public execution. They're confident the Lord will intervene and deliver them, and He *does*, but probably not in the way we would hope for had we been in that situation.

Here's what God's idea of deliverance was that day: They would stand, seemingly alone, before the most powerful and (at the time) the most angry man in all the world. They'd be sentenced to a terrifying death, thrown *into* a blazing fire, and then, when all is said and done, they'd be back where they started: Working for the very same man who tried to burn them alive, alongside a bunch of haters who wanted them dead! *That* was God's idea of deliverance in this story.

The Lord's deliverance wasn't made to order, but, as we all know, it was much *more* glorious because of how He worked in and through these men that day. We begin in verse 13, where Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego have just been singled out by their co-workers for refusing to worship the statue there on the plain of Dura.

Daniel 3:13-15 - ¹³ Then Nebuchadnezzar, in rage and fury, gave the command to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. So they brought these men before the king.

¹⁴ Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the gold image which I have set up? ¹⁵ Now if you are ready at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in

¹ <https://www.eturbonews.com/70626/tourists-locals-ate-all-food-peed-sun-loungers-and-defecated-poo>

symphony with all kinds of music, and you fall down and worship the image which I have made, *good!* But if you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. And who *is* the god who will deliver you from my hands?"

Nebuchadnezzar is as mad as a person can be. With the whole of his empire's leadership gathered together, he had been defied by these 3 Hebrew captives, who refused to obey a relatively simple command. A huge black eye for his pride.

For all his fury in this moment, it *seems* like he was at least trying to restrain his anger. He gives them a second chance to bow. And, we'll be told later in the text, when they refuse again, his face changes toward them for the worse. So, it would seem that he *liked* these guys. I'm guessing he had worked closely with them for some time and, like Daniel, they had found favor in his eyes.

Now, verse 15 closes with a line that brings a smile to our face when we read it, right? "**WHO IS THE GOD** who will deliver you from my hands?" I'm so glad you asked! It's like in any movie when one character says, "Oh yeah? You and *WHAT* army?" When that happens, you know something awesome is about to go down!

We're getting a look into what Nebuchadnezzar really thought about religion. As far as he was concerned, *he* was more powerful and in charge than any god on the books, including his own Babylonian gods. In fact, we'll see that this pride is ultimately what will bring God's judgment on him.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego knew what Nebuchadnezzar did not: That they weren't really in *his* hands. No, they were safely held in the hands of their God. They would've remembered that the strong arm of the Lord "carried [the Israelites in the wilderness], as a man carries his son."² More recently, Isaiah had shared this message from God:

Isaiah 46:4b - I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.

These tender promises aren't only for Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego, they're for you and I as well. Jesus said:

John 10:29 - ²⁹ My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father's hand.

The Lord holds us and leads us and lifts us by His hand.

Daniel 3:16 - ¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.

This is a pretty remarkable response. While they maintain an attitude of humility and respect, they say, "You know, we don't really need to answer you." It's not out of smugness. It's not because they had a secret understanding of what was about to happen. It's simply that they had a firm confidence, a *living hope* in God and so they were not shaken. They continue in verse 17:

Daniel 3:17-18 - ¹⁷ If that *is the case*, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver *us* from your hand, O king. ¹⁸ But if not, let it be

² Deuteronomy 1:31

known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.”

“Even if God chooses *not* to save us, we will not bow.” Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him. This is a *great* mindset for our faith and for our prayer lives. We should *expect* God to intervene, to act, to deliver according to His purposes. We should *ask* Him to do all that, to do astounding things. But, if He *doesn't* do what we were hoping for, we proceed all the same. For Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego it made no difference whether they lived or died that day. Their faith and their behavior would be the same. At first that seems strange, until we step back and think about what we know to be true. We know God loves us and that we love Him. We know He knows all and is full of goodness and grace toward us. And so, I can abound in hope, despite my circumstances, and I can commit my ways to Him, walking by faith. He may lead me *out* of a storm or *through* a storm or *into* a storm, but either way, He is always good and He is always right and I can *trust* Him. Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego are living out this confident trust in the Lord.

Notice too, before we move on, in what might've been their last few moments alive they took the opportunity to *preach*. They said to Nebuchadnezzar: “Let it be known to you.” They *wanted* him to know about why they were doing what they were doing. They wanted him to know about their God, how great He was, how He was the *only* God worth serving.

Daniel 3:19-23 - ¹⁹ Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury, and the expression on his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. He spoke and commanded that they heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated. ²⁰ And he commanded certain mighty men of valor who were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, and cast them into the burning fiery furnace. ²¹ Then these men were bound in their coats, their trousers, their turbans, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. ²² Therefore, because the king's command was urgent, and the furnace exceedingly hot, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. ²³ And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

We know the end of the story, of course, but we have to come to terms with the fact that *this* was God's idea of deliverance that day. Really? This is the big idea? “Hey Lord, if You want to get fire involved, how about some fire from heaven to consume our enemies? Or how about a fiery chariot to swoop down and get us out of here?” But no, the Lord allowed Nebuchadnezzar to throw all he could as *fast* as he could at them.

One commentary pointed out that Nebuchadnezzar was so angry he wasn't thinking straight. That's clear from his hasty order which cost the lives of his Seal Team 6 there, but as this author also noted, “In this senseless rage, Nebuchadnezzar overdid himself. By heating the furnace seven times hotter than usual, he would actually be *decreasing* the length of their torment, rather than prolonging it.”³

Daniel 3:24 - ²⁴ Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished; and he rose in haste and spoke, saying to his counselors, “Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?” They answered and said to the king, “True, O king.”

Everyone on the platform was quick to give a “yes sir, absolutely sir” to the maniac on the throne.

³ Daniel: The Kingdom of the Lord Feinberg, Charles

Daniel 3:25 - ²⁵ “Look!” he answered, “I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.”

The text is more accurately translated as “the form of the fourth is like a son of the gods.” Nebuchadnezzar wouldn’t have had an understanding of the Anointed Son of God, so the declaration we read there in the New King James is, perhaps, stepping a little too far. But, either way, it was clear that there was a divine presence there alongside the 3 men. We recognize this as a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ. It’s *possible* it was an angel, but more likely and more fittingly it is the Lord Himself.

Notice that this portion of the story is told from *Nebuchadnezzar’s* perspective. We’ll get no report from *inside* the furnace. Their firsthand experience, their talk with the Lord, that never gets recounted. Instead, we see what it looks like from the outside. Those watching this unfold saw that the God of the Bible walks with His people in their sufferings. That they are not defined by fear, but by faith and by trust and by expectation.

While our circumstances are significantly different than what we’re reading here, God *still* wants to operate this way. He wants to *reveal* His work and His presence through the days of *your* life to the world around you. Like Moses coming down the mountain and shining from God’s glory, or the disciples there before the Sanhedrin in Acts 4, who spoke with such boldness that these unbelieving guys realized, “They had been with Jesus.” That’s what God wants to do in your life and mine.

Daniel 3:26-27 - ²⁶ Then Nebuchadnezzar went near the mouth of the burning fiery furnace *and* spoke, saying, “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come *here*.” Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego came from the midst of the fire. ²⁷ And the satraps, administrators, governors, and the king’s counselors gathered together, and they saw these men on whose bodies the fire had no power; the hair of their head was not singed nor were their garments affected, and the smell of fire was not on them.

My favorite part of all of this is when we realize that Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego could have left the furnace *any time they wanted!* Nebuchadnezzar says, “Hey, come out!” And they come out. Yet, they waited. Perhaps the Lord had instructed them to do so. Or maybe they were thinking, “Who cares about this fire, the Son of God is in here with us!” If you could re-live this story, wouldn’t you rather be *in* the fire with Jesus than just watching from the outside? Of course you would.

When the king calls them, they head out. I wonder if they lingered for a moment or two. But once out we see there were totally, miraculously preserved. The ropes that bound them had burned away, but nothing else was effected on any level, they even still had the smell of their aftershave from that morning. This gives us a great type of God’s protection of the 144,000 sealed Jews during the Great Tribulation. Totally secure from the relentless attacks from the AntiChrist.

Daniel 3:28 - ²⁸ Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, and they have frustrated the king’s word, and yielded their bodies, that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God!

Nebuchadnezzar has progressed a bit since chapter 2. Back in chapter 2, Daniel had interpreted his dream, and Nebuchadnezzar said, “Wow, your God knows some stuff!” Here, his declaration was a bit greater, a bit fuller. God’s working on his heart. But then he has to go and ruin it in verse 29:

Daniel 3:29 - ²⁹ Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation, or language which speaks anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made an ash heap; because there is no other God who can deliver like this.”

Nebuchadnezzar assumes that God is, essentially, like the king of Babylon. Ruling through intimidation. Demanding lip service. What we actually see in this story is that the Lord wants to be honored not the way Nebuchadnezzar thinks, but the way Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego honored Him: That we *trust* Him. That’s what God is excited about.

Daniel 3:30 - ³⁰ Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego in the province of Babylon.

Seems like a great ending, until you realize, “Wait a minute, that means they have to go back to work for *this* guy and with these Chaldeans who wanted to get them killed!” Their co-workers had been mad that they were promoted, now they get promoted *again!* And, sure, Nebuchadnezzar is a *little* closer to understanding who God is, but he’s not saved yet. He’s still a madman and a tyrant and a killer. And yet, they woke up the next morning and went back to work. That’s amazing faith!

Nebuchadnezzar had said there in verse 29: “There is no other God who can deliver like this.” God, *that’s* your idea of deliverance?

What’s *your* idea of deliverance? Or even go wider. What’s your idea of the Lord and His work? The Scriptures reveal Him to be a God of power, a God of peace, a God of provision. A God who works and moves and leads His people. A God who broadcasts His glory and grace *through* the lives of His servants. Passages like this one, which inspire us so much, also invite us to take a look at whether this is how God is operating in our own lives. No, we don’t face a daily threat of martyrdom, but look in the Bible. Is there *any* servant of God who the Lord came to and said, “Ok, you’re My child. You’re My servant, and I’ve decided I’m not going to do *anything* in your life. You stay here, nothing’s gonna happen, then I’ll bring you to heaven at the end of your time on earth!” Of course not! In fact, we see that God uses *every* kind of person in every sort of place to reveal Himself and to accomplish His work. He uses shepherds and farmers and kings and academics. He uses government officials and household servants, poets and business owners, fishermen and soldiers. Moms and children. Prisoners and conquerors. Poor people, rich people. Strong people. Weak people. He uses all kinds. To *show* Himself. To show His power. That’s what He does.

In a sense, Nebuchadnezzar’s blasphemous statement in verse 15 is why you are on the earth right now. “Who is the God who will deliver you?” And the Lord used the lives of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego to answer.

Who is the God who forgives sins? *Who* is the God who redeems? *Who* is the God who heals the broken hearted? Who is the God who restores? Who is the God who overcomes and transforms and empowers and loves? Who is the God who could do these things? The answer is delivered *through us*. That’s God’s big idea. That’s His idea of action and deliverance.