

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^[a] 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.”

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. ²² 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, ²³ and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

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.”

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.

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. (Daniel 3:16-28 NIV2011)

God Will Deliver Us

“It’s going to be okay. I promise,” dad reassures his son after a brutal fall off the bike. And he trusts dad because dad promised. “We’ll get dessert on the way home. I promise.” They trust her because she said those words. “I will and God give me strength,” the student promises to remain faithful to Word and Sacrament on her Confirmation Day. And the congregation trusts her because she promises. “I promise to be faithful to you,” they promise to each other on their wedding day. He trusts her. She trusts him. They made a promise. Promises. Words that we believe and trust will be true.

Promises. That’s all Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego have to go on as they face mighty King Nebuchadnezzar. These three men live as strangers in a strange land in captivity in Babylon. That was already a test enough; and now this. The instructions were simple. Nebuchadnezzar

makes an image of gold, ninety feet high and nine feet wide, and sets it up so that all could see. (Think of a statue about the size of a tall barn silo or three of our bell towers stacked on top of each other of gold brightly reflecting the sun.) When the instruments start playing all the people attending the dedication must bow down and worship it. This too comes with a promise: whoever did not do this would be thrown into a blazing, fiery, furnace. So when the king hears about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego he is furious! Who do they think they are? they should realize this is a promise he intends to keep!

The king decides to give them another chance. He repeats the orders along with another promise: “If you bow down this time to this statue, then I will forget about your earlier insolence. But if you do not, I’m serious, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. I promise,” (Daniel 3:15). And the three men respond, **“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 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”** (vv.16-18). They aren’t being arrogant. They weren’t poking the bear and trying to provoke the king. They weren’t going to argue with him. Nebuchadnezzar wasn’t going to change his mind. They weren’t going to change their decision either. It’s the Lord’s first command: you shall have no other gods. You shall not bow down to any other gods, idols, or statues. Worship the Lord your God and serve him only. Fear, love, and trust in him above all things even if that’s putting your life on the line. It’s as simple as that. They know the Lord’s promises. They don’t ask for a miracle. They don’t expect one either. They simply stand trial in the quiet confidence of faith, “God is able to deliver us,” fearing, loving, and trusting that God’s will will be done.

How would you do in a similar situation? That might be hard to imagine. I haven’t seen anyone raise up 90 ft. golden statues recently. Then again, there are all sorts of idols to tempt us with promises that entice or threaten us. An idol is anything that we fear, love, or trust more than God. The idol of money and stuff rises up with the promise that if you are able to have certain things, a certain amount, a little more, you will find a little more peace, purpose, security. As one wise pastor once wrote, the desire for more “sticks glued to our nature right up to the grave” (Luther’s Large Catechism, *First Commandment*). Quickly rising up behind that idol is the idol of work, working more, being busy, with the promise that as long as you work hard you can have all of that along with feeling more fulfilled, validated, and better about yourself. That ties in nicely with the idol of the good things we have done, how we have volunteered, how we went out of the way for someone. We dare not forget the idol of family, especially children and their happiness, friends and reputation. We bow down and worship them when we turn a blind eye to sin, when we do not hold tightly to God’s Word, when we make excuses, when we allow them to get in the way of our relationship with God. Then there’s those seemingly little idols that we look to mix up the monotony of life, ignore the responsibilities, dull the mind and escape for a time. I say little because in the eyes of the world they often don’t seem like a big deal. The reality is they can be the most dangerous as we fail to see how it may be harming our relationship with God. The list goes on and on; we are idol-making factories pumping out new ones every day. What is it that you turn to find help and comfort?

What it makes it so very difficult is that often when we resist it leads to more difficulty of some type. We may not be called in front of kings, princes, and emperors but our friends, our families, this world often demand an answer when we do resist. And this often comes with promises: “If you don’t do this, your relationship will go up in flames. Your reputation will be thrown into the fire. Your opportunities will turn to ashes. If you don’t do this, you will suffer in some way.” So we fear missing out. We trust that they are right. And by our actions we show we love the created things more than the Creator. When confronted with our sin we confess that we do not fear, love, and trust God above all while making our own promises: “I’ll do better next time. I promise this is the last time.” But then the good we want to do is not what we do but it’s the bad we keep on doing. “What a wretched man I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24).

You and I are not much different from Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They too struggled with these sins. They too were sinners. And you have what they did: God’s promise to deliver. When facing the temptation of idols, when faced with threats from this world, Jesus says to watch out and be on your guard (Mark 13: 5, 9). Jesus warns us the world will hate us because of him. History proves this point. It’s stained red with the blood of the martyrs who have stood up for their faith, refused to renounce it, and died for the faith. So we too should not be surprised that we must face pressure and suffer for doing what is right and following God’s will (1 Peter 3).

We see that happen with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. When they refuse to bow down to that idol, Nebuchadnezzar rages against them. He can’t believe them. These men cannot burn quickly enough. He orders to preheat that oven to the highest it will go. Then he orders his strongest soldiers to tie up these three still wearing their clothes and throw them into the fire. The furnace is so hot that it kills those strong men. And most often that’s the end of the story for God’s holy ones. We think of Stephen who the Jews stone, the apostles who presumably all but John die for the faith, the Christians who die in the Colosseum of Rome, so many others throughout history continuing into today who lose their livelihood and have to run for their lives. May God keep us faithful to the point of death too.

But this time in Daniel it will be different to prove a point. While Nebuchadnezzar revels in his own sick justice and consoles his injured pride, he looks into the furnace and jumps up in amazement. Don’t worry, he can count. He knows they threw three men into the furnace. But there’s no mistaking there are four men walking around in the fire like it’s another day in the park, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods (Daniel 3:25). When the three come out, the fire had done nothing to them with not a mark on their bodies. Not even a hair is singed. Their clothes that should have gone up in flames first are not scorched. In fact, there’s not even the smell of smoke on them. Nebuchadnezzar cannot believe what he sees and cries out, **“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”** (v.28). Don’t take this to mean that Nebuchadnezzar came to be a believer. Instead, this is

as Jesus says in Matthew 5 that even the heathen unbelievers will see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Strangers we might be in this world. Differently from those around us we live. But you are no longer bound captive, dear brothers and sisters in Christ. Though we face a world filled with idols made by others and of our own making, though often we have left him, your God will not leave you. He promises. Though we must remain in this world and go through the flames of testing, you are not on your own. You have one who fights by your side upon the plain with his good gifts and Spirit. God promises in the Garden of Eden one who will come and crush the serpent Satan's head. It's one whom God himself elected. You ask, "Who is this?" Jesus Christ it is! The Almighty Lord, there is no other God except him. He knows how tempting those idols can be. He was tempted like you and resisted them. He knows the empty promises and lies you hear, he's the Truth that sets us free. And because it's God's Son who set you free you are free indeed (John 8:36). He takes on flesh blood to destroy the devil's work. You are not held captive by sin; with his own blood Jesus has bought you and made you his own. Even death and the terror of the grave holds no power over you. Jesus' blood has blotted out your many idol-worshipping sins and creates a clean heart within you. He takes our place fearing, loving, trusting God above all things perfectly. Jesus endures the flames of hell on that cross, punished for our peace, so that you might walk without guilt in life or fear in death. He dies so that you may rest in your Father's hands a forgiven child of God. He lives to wipe away all your tears and give you the sure promise that you too will live.

Promises. That's what God gives you. He's spoken them into your ears and onto your heart through His spoken Word. He seals these promises to you in water and Word in Baptism. He reassures you of his promises as he works through spoken Word and promises given and poured out for you in the Lord's Supper. You trust these promises because the spoken Word itself works faith that grabs onto, receives, and makes them your own. They are yours not because of your own doing, but by grace alone you are saved through faith alone created in your heart by Scripture alone. Be faithful until the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life, Jesus promises. And we know it and trust because he died for you and rose again, just as he promised. God will deliver us either in this life or through death. Either way, God will deliver us. He promises. Amen.