

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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Unshaken_ Daniel Chapter 3

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Well, it's great to be with y'all this weekend. I know it's been a minute, but I'm still around, alive and well, it's all good. Hey, since it's been a little while, I just wanted to give you a couple of updates. I know some folks have been asking. My family is doing well as Pastor Mark has mentioned, we transition to Baltimore the transition has gone well, the family is doing good. I want to thank all of you guys who supported Blueprint, the nonprofit that we've launched. We engaged with an elementary school in West Baltimore, and it's been going well obviously up until COVID-19 hit, we were engaging with some fourth and fifth grade boys. We're on a, or we're in, I should say a holding pattern right now. So just be praying for us as we try to figure out, you know what this looks like moving forward. And my apologies to those of you who offered your skills and expertise and we just haven't figured out how to deploy those yet. But thank you guys so much for all of your support, the calls the emails, just the text message, we've had a couple of visitors so thank you guys so much. And I also want to say the phase two of the church plant; we'll talk a little bit about that the next time I speak in a few weeks. And we got a name for the church plant and all that stuff we'll tell you about in case you want to figure out how you can get involved in our launch team. That's the Baltimore update.

Now I just want to share a quick personal update and maybe it's not really that quick because as we look at what's happening around us, it's been very personal for me. The last four or five weeks or so have been really, really challenging and exhausting, as we have been talking about the deaths of Ahmaud Armory and Brionna Taylor and George Floyd and Rayshard Brooks just recently in Atlanta. And these are just the most recent names but these names and these instances have really stirred our country, have stirred our community and have stirred us internationally. But it also made me think about how we've been here before and there are other names like Philando Castile and Eric Garner, and Sandra Bland, and I'm even thinking of Tamir Rice this week, who would have turned 18, was killed when he was 12 years old. He had a toy gun at a playground and was killed by police. I'm not exhausted because I'm tired of talking about this and maybe some of you are in this category where you are tired of talking. And I can understand that but we also need to be about action as well but I really want to tell you the source of my exhaustion. And it really has to do with feeling like I'm in this unending wrestling match for people to care and care at the level that I think that they should. But I want to break this down just a little bit, because my issue is really with those who say they follow Jesus, because yes, I want everyone to care about this at a particular level. But those of us who are Jesus followers, we are called to a different standard. And my problem right now is with a few things, like for example, arguing whether systemic racism is real. The key word here is arguing like, it's a waste of time. Why are we arguing about this? Or we're elevating the ideological issues related to black lives matter above black lives just mattering in general. Or we say things that are de-emphasizing the issue of justice being central to the gospel. There's no need to de-emphasize that because it's very prominent in the scriptures.

It makes me feel like some of us are more interested in being right than being in a right relationship. Especially when we have brothers and sisters, primarily black and brown, who don't feel hurt, who don't feel valued or who don't feel cared for, which by the way, is in congruent with the collective joy and pain that we should feel as one body. I'm talking to Christ followers right now. And that's what the Apostle Paul was saying in I Corinthians 12. It seems like some of us are more interested in being on the right side of issues than being in right relationship

with individuals. And I offer to you, not my words, not my ideas, but a reevaluation of the theme that we see running throughout scripture that we've heard before called reconciliation, which is primarily motivated by the desire to be in right relationship, and that is evidence by God's pursuit of us. "While we were yet sinners", meaning we were apart from him, we weren't pursuing him he was pursuing us. And then I'm reminded by the words or of the words of the Apostle Paul, when he's writing to Christians, to Christ followers, the people of 'The Way' in Philippi, and he's says, "In humility value, others above yourself." He didn't say value one another based on the issues that are going on between you he said no generally speaking value one another above yourselves. And then he goes on to say, "This is the mindset of Christ, who made himself nothing to sacrifice on our behalf."

That's a little bit of a snapshot of how I'm processing and personally feeling. But I want you to know, that is not tangential to the message this weekend as we continue in our series, 'Unshaken' through the book of Daniel, and it's not tangential because this idea of humility and sacrifice comes front and center and I want you to know that sacrifice is a major thread throughout Scripture climaxing in the gospels with Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. So if you have a Bible will you meet me and Daniel three as we zoom in there this weekend? But before we get there, let me just give you a quick recap and little intro and we'll dive right in if you've been following along in this series, and maybe you haven't, but there's this is guy named Daniel. And Daniel's got some homies, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah also known as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and they're Jewish exiles, they're young men, but they represent the finest, smartest, brightest of the Jewish people. They're favored, and then selected to serve in this administration in this foreign government for this foreign leader, this king Nebuchadnezzar.

Now, on one hand, I guess this is good for them as exiles, because they will have access they'll have favor, they'll have positions of influence. But then on the other hand is not really ideal because this is a foreign place for them and the customs are different of the people and they're reminded of their inferiority regularly as Jews and they're not necessarily beloved people. But I want to elevate for you or highlight for you that the primary tension here or the primary thing that Daniel and these Hebrew boys are having to navigate is this - balancing a dual submission to God and a Gentile King, a king that knows nothing about their traditions, cares nothing about their traditions, but yet they're supposed to be submitted to him. And there's a tension here, no doubt. A tension that is related to religion, I can argue related to race and it's also cultural as well. And with all of these elements kind of swirling around there's a clash is inevitable.

Now, this is not irrelevant for us, or unusual. A few thousand years later, we are dealing with these kinds of clashes every day and they're very elevated, especially over the last couple of months or so. So as we look at this scene, in Daniel three, and we look at the first several verses up to verse 11, we've got this guy, King Nebuchadnezzar, who I mentioned already, I'm just going to nickname of Nebby for this weekend, alright, we gonna call him Nebby. And so Nebby decides that he's gonna have this golden image that the Bible says is six cubits high in Babylon. I want you to just get an image of this. Like if you've ever been in the Union Station and seeing the ceiling, that is about six cubits high, that's pretty tall. So we were talking about something huge here.

So, Nebuchadnezzar he summons all of this kind of government officials from all over the place and they need to take a pilgrimage to come to this dedication and this worship service. And the decree says that when the music plays, that everyone is supposed to bow down and worship this golden monstrosity that Nebuchadnezzar has erected and non compliance if you do not do this, you will be toast, literally. You will be thrown into a burning

furnace or a blazing furnace. Nebby is saying, "Yo, I'm the man, there ain't nobody greater than me." And Nebby is only really interested in one thing, its obvious - supremacy. And then he's using intimidation to make his point.

Now I'm gonna put a little quarter in the meter and park right here for just a second because it would be, I think irresponsible of me to not talk about the elephant in the room as it relates to this big statue that King Nebuchadnezzar wants erected as we deal with these issues of statues in our country, mainly these Confederate statues and Confederate symbols. Man throughout history has been erecting things to make a point mainly around pride. Not necessarily in the interest of unification or the celebration of common good. And let me just say something about this Confederate symbolism because it reminded me of a conversation that I had with one of my guys when I was leaving the Kingstown campus and I won't say his name, a great guy. But we had a conversation a few years ago and he told me that he and his wife had decided to remove all of the Confederate symbolism in his house, well; I shouldn't say all like it was a bunch, but he has some Confederate symbolism in his house, and he decided to remove it. And the reason was, because he and his wife were going to foster a little black girl for a period of time. And they understood that the symbolism behind that was offensive to black people and painful and so he removed it because it was not a promotion of unity.

The apostle Paul talks extensively about this in the New Testament, and I don't have time to unpack this, this weekend, so catch me after the message, I'm going to do an interview with my boy, Charles Williams. And we're going to talk a little bit about this. But I wanted to at least touch on this point this weekend because this is something that we're dealing with in our culture.

Verse seven, of Daniel three, it says that "*All nations and peoples in every language fell down and worshiped this golden image*". Now, if I'm Jewish, this is a problem. That's not what we do. This goes completely against the grain of who we are as people and the God that we serve. So note to self here, or processing to self here - is okay, all I have to do is bow down when the song comes on and I won't burn. Ah, that's a little tricky, but a brother don't want to burn so I might need to consider that. Maybe that's the rational thing because everyone knows that this is a completely irrational decree, and no rational person would blame you for choosing your survival. But sometimes, irrational actions require irrational responses. And when I say irrational responses, I'm not talking about inciting war or violence or those. I'm just talking about a response that goes against the grain. Word on the street, got back to Nebby's officials and some of the officials was dropping a dime on these Hebrew boys. I don't have time to tell you what 'dropping a dime'... just Google it.

But the officials were talking to Nebuchadnezzar and we pick it up in verse 12. This is what one of the officials is saying to our boy Nebby. He said, "*There are some Jews you have appointed to manage the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men have ignored you, the king; they do not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up.* ¹³ *Then in a furious rage Nebuchadnezzar gave orders to bring in Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king.* ¹⁴ *Nebuchadnezzar asked them, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, is it true that you don't serve my gods or worship the gold statue I have set up?"* ¹⁵ *Now if you're ready, when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, drum, and every kind of music, fall down and worship the statue I made. But if you don't worship it, you will immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire—and who is the god who can rescue you from my power?"*

Man Nebuchadnezzar's bold right here, bro. Because if I recall in just a previous chapter in verses 46 and 47 it said that Nebuchadnezzar fell down in front of Daniel and he's worshipping God. He said, he's the God of Gods in

the Lord of kings. So he's got a little amnesia right here or maybe he's just trying to one up this God. And he's asking this question that I want us to ponder this weekend, who is your God?

The decisions that we make, they are directly related to what we value and what we prioritize and nothing clarifies our priorities than we are, when we are confronted with challenges, with opposition with adversity. And I love the way Pastor Heather put it last weekend, she says when we face difficult, and I will say sometimes impossible situations, that is when our character is revealed. The revelation of character is an indication of what and who we have amplified in our lives. The question of who is your God is equal to how we on a daily basis, choose how we converse, and how we commune with God and one another, even if that exists. When I talk about God, maybe you commune with one...but it's all displayed in what we do every day. And this is part of why I'm troubled with what I'm seeing with Jesus followers in this current moment of tension that we are seeing, because I'm not seeing the character of humility and sacrifice being elevated when I read comments on some social media posts. I'm not seeing or hearing all of the values of the gospel elevated, just the ones that fit certain agendas. I'm hearing rhetoric and ideologies that we've adopted and then put God in the middle of and all this means is it's about us and our personal comfort and preservation. And, hey, maybe you're good with that but I would say you can only be good with it if you're submitted to you because to be submitted to God or the God of the universe and to be in relationship with him through Jesus is another thing because we humbly and sacrificially give ourselves to Him. Why? Because we trust that his will is greater than our own. And, yo, it ain't nothing comfortable about that but God gives us grace to manage it. And then Jesus said that we will have the Holy Spirit that will lead us and guide us into all truth.

So, this brings us back to King Nebby's question here and how Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego responded, everything is at stake here. But as I process this, there's like three or four options here, maybe

- Okay, they could bow down in private, they're having a private conversation with Nebuchadnezzar; they could ask God for forgiveness later, but at some point, like they're going to be out in public right or somebody might see them and so like they could have this whole situation, so they bow down in public right now, but it really doesn't solve the issue.
- Or maybe option two that can tell Nebby, "Like, Nebby yo, listen, you're gonna believe these guys over us?" They can refute those claims but at some point, again, this issue is going to come up, it doesn't really solve the problem.
- Or maybe there's option three, they can just say, "Nebby, man. Well, we just can't do it, man. We just, we just not gonna bow down." And we know what's gonna happen at that point.
- Or option four, maybe like they can run? I mean, I don't know.

But what you need to understand here is that the real tension that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego have is pointed directly to Exodus 20. That's where we have the Ten Commandments. And the two commandments that will be violated here would be - "Having any god before God" and "bowing down to any image, any golden image, like any image that's in the form of God".

So what do they do? I mean, I feel like John Quiñones right here from ABC, - What would you do? It's hard to say, hypothetically, because you're not in that situation and the rational and logical thing with me, 'hey, maybe we go with option one or two'. Just a small compromise but these compromises always start small. And then they grow. And we never know how big they grow or what they're gonna lead to next.

But let me just tell you what happened. So this was the response verses 16 through 18. This is what happened, 16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied to the king, *“Nebuchadnezzar, we don't need to give you an answer to this question.”*¹⁷ *If the God we serve exists, then he can rescue us from the furnace of blazing fire, and he can rescue us from the power of you, the king.*¹⁸ *But even if he does not rescue us, we want you as king to know that we will not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you set up.”*

Basically, their livelihood and their actual lives is seemingly forfeited at this point. Nebuchadnezzar is trying to cancel these dudes. This is what happens to us and this is why we got to be careful when we hook our prosperity to a system or sociological ideology. And when that's threatened, we then tend to compromise or look the other way or play it safe because we see that as our livelihood and God is not our priority, he's not our pursuit, and he's not the position and foundation that we stand on but not Daniel and these three Hebrew boys. They said, "God's got this." Listen, you can take away our land, we still won't bow down. You can take away our home, we still won't bow down. You can take away our family, we still won't bow down. You can take away our livelihood, we still won't bow down. You can change our names. Because Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were not their name, you can change our names, and we still won't bow down. You can give us money, you can give us houses, you can give us clothes, you can give us promotion, but we still won't bow down. Why? Because God said he is supreme, and there's no one greater than him.

And then as we read through the conclusion of Daniel three, we see what happened. Nebby wasn't feeling it. He said turn the fire up seven times hotter. And so he turned it up and they had them bound and then through the three Hebrew boys in and it was so hot that it killed the soldiers who we're throwing them in. And Nebby sat back but then he stood up real quick because when he looked down, there was three but he said, looks like there's someone else, I see four, it looks like someone that is the Son of Man, I see another. And what he saw was the Son of Man showing up, showing up in the middle of the fire, showing up with these boys who stood up on his behalf.

And all I want to say this weekend is maybe God will show up if we sacrifice for him, if we sacrifice our will, for his will. Maybe God will show up if we got on his agenda instead of trying to add him to our agenda. And this is not the only example we see of this. In Scripture, there's this theme of sacrifice that I mentioned before, and God showing up in the middle of hard situations. God showing up in the middle of people, God doing extraordinary things on people's behalf, people like Noah and Abraham and Moses and Joseph and Job and Esther and Rahab and David and we can go on and on.

And so the question this weekend is; who is your God? And do your choices, your conversations and your communion; is it a reflection of that? When and where are you compromising in your life? Bowing down to things that are lesser, but you've attached your prosperity and your livelihood to it. Maybe God will show up in the middle of this civil unrest that we're experiencing right now. If we'd just step back and humbled ourselves, and we sacrifice and we say, 'God, show us the way, show us our hearts, show us where we're wrong.' Let us not be bowing down to ideologies that we think will lead us to peace, but that we will bow down to the Prince of Peace

and let him lead us. The King of kings and the Lord of lords, he wants to be priority number one in our lives. Will you choose him? Will you serve him? Will you follow him?

Let's pray. God, we thank you for this challenge this weekend that you've given to us to the person that feels like they're in the middle of the fire or maybe they're on the brink of being thrown into the fire. Let this be an encouragement and a reminder just as it was to the Jewish people that although they were exiled, although they were in the middle of a situation, that seemed impossible, you were in the middle with them, you were their God. God, we want you to show up and show out on our behalf but oftentimes we're trying to tell you how to do it. But God help us to humble ourselves, to push aside our agendas, to sacrifice our will and to pursue you, make you priority and let you be the position where we plant ourselves. Help us to be unshaken, in Jesus name we pray, amen.