

Intro: **“We must obey God rather than men.”** Shortly after Jesus’ ascension, the disciples were persecuted for preaching the gospel of Jesus in the temple courts by being arrested and put in a public jail. But that night God miraculously rescued them from the jail and the next day they were again preaching the gospel of Jesus again in the temple courts. And, once again, they were confronted by the Sanhedrin and ordered not to preach about Jesus anymore. At this the disciples responded with the words with which I began, **“We must obey God rather than men.”** Even though they were told not to preach Jesus under the threat of further punishment, the disciples could not help but remain faithful to God and proclaim his Son as the Savior of the world. We have as our text today the familiar story of the three men in the fiery furnace, a story many of learned already in our youth from a faithful Sunday School teacher. Now, even though this story may be from a time long ago, it still has value for us believers in the 21st century. These three faithful men were persecuted for their beliefs; they were threatened with a horrible death by fire. Yet, even under the threat of a horrible death by fire, these men disobeyed the man who told them to compromise their beliefs and remained faithful to their God. They were of the same opinion as the disciples; they were going to obey God rather than men. And so it is with us. We faithful believers are already persecuted for our beliefs and may, soon, face more dire persecution, even death, for our beliefs. In such times may we remain faithful as those three men. In those times may our response be **We Must Obey God Rather Than Men**. We will do so **1) Even in the face of persecution**. And we will do so **2) entrusting ourselves to God’s will**.

- I. Even in the face of persecution
 - A. Nebuchadnezzar’s idol, command, and threat
 1. Nebuchadnezzar’s idol
 - a. 90’ high and 9’ wide and made of gold
 - b. those were the dimensions and that was the composition of the idol Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had fashioned
 - c. probably in honor of one of his gods
 - d. and it was to the dedication of that idol that Nebuchadnezzar summoned all of the important officials of his kingdom
 - e. including Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego
 2. bow down or die
 - a. at this dedication ceremony Nebuchadnezzar made the decree

- b. that at a predetermined time all had to bow down to the idol he had made
 - c. and worship it
 - d. and that all those who did not would be thrown into a blazing furnace
- B. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego’s disobedience and faithfulness
 1. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego will not worship a false god
 - a. after the prearranged signal had been given, all the people fell down and worshipped the idol Nebuchadnezzar had fashioned
 - b. all, that is, except Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego
 - c. their disobedience was immediately reported to Nebuchadnezzar
 - d. and he immediately summoned them to ask them why they had not obeyed his decree and worshipped his idol
 - e. and that is where our text begins
 - f. **(16-18)**
 - g. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego respectfully told Nebuchadnezzar that they could not and would not **“serve [his] gods”** nor **“worship the image of gold”** he had set up
 - h. and that they were willing to be thrown into his burning furnace and die a fiery death
 - i. so long as they remained faithful to their God
 - j. Nebuchadnezzar said as much when he said, **(3:28, “...[they] were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God.”)**
 2. death by fire was the only outcome possible for these three men
 - a. death by fire must be a horrible thing
 - b. do you remember the heart-wrenching scenes of people on 9/11 who were jumping out of windows hundreds of feet above the ground in order to escape the flames and death by fire?
 - c. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were staring straight into the face of such a death
 - d. the details of the story make such a death a most certain outcome
 - e. **(19-23)**
 3. the fire was deathly hot
 - a. because Nebuchadnezzar was so enraged that these foreigners would defy him
 - b. that he had the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual – the Hebrew construction indicates that it was made ‘as hot as possible’ –
 - c. this was probably achieved by throwing naphtha – an oily, flammable liquid – and pitch into it

- d. and, as a result the fire became so hot and the heat so intense
 - e. that it killed the soldiers who just came near it by throwing Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into it
 - 4. bound and fully clothed
 - a. in addition, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were throw into the fire bound
 - b. which meant that there was no way they had the ability to escape
 - c. and fully-clothed, **“wearing their robes, trousers, turbans, and other clothes”**
 - d. all of which were highly flammable
 - e. and which would serve as more fuel for the fire
 - f. there was no way these men were going to survive – the fire would eat them up easily and quickly
 - g. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were well aware of what would happen to them
 - h. and, yet they were willing to disobey Nebuchadnezzar and not worship his false god
 - i. in order to remain faithful to their God
- Trans: To such great lengths Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were willing to go to obey God rather than men.

II. Entrusting ourselves to God’s will

A. God will do as he sees fit

- 1. God can save us
 - a. how could they be so bold and so confident in their disobedience and their faithfulness to God?
 - b. we’ll let them tell us **(17-18)**
 - c. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego could be so bold and confident because they had entrusted themselves and this matter to God’s will
 - d. they were confident that God had the ability and power to save them if he chose
- 2. but God would do as he saw fit
 - a. but they also knew that the possibility existed that God might not save them from the fire
 - b. they knew the choice was up to God
 - c. and they were fine with that
 - d. it would not change a thing for them
 - e. they simply were not going to obey Nebuchadnezzar and worship his idol
 - f. their obedience to God was not dependent on a positive outcome for them

- g. no matter the outcome, they were not going to worship a false god
- h. but remain faithful to the true God
- B. God miraculously saved these men
 - 1. God sent his angel to be with them
 - a. in his inscrutable will, God chose to save Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego
 - b. **(24-27)**
 - c. in morbid curiosity, Nebuchadnezzar watched the execution of these three faithful men
 - d. but, when he looked into the fire, he did not see what he expected to see – three men being burned alive
 - e. instead, he saw **“four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed”**
 - f. quickly identifying the fourth man as one who looked **“like a son of the gods”**
 - g. and Nebuchadnezzar later correctly identified this fourth man and his reason for being there when he said **(3:28, “Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants!”)**
 - h. Nebuchadnezzar did not know the full import of his statement but he was exactly right
 - i. God had sent an angel to protect Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fire
 - j. just like the psalm writer promised **(Ps 91:11, “For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways...”)**
 - 2. God saved Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego
 - a. even though death was most certain, God saved Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fire
 - b. when Nebuchadnezzar and his royal officials looked at the three men who had come out of the fire
 - c. they noticed **“that the fire had not harmed their bodies”**
 - d. in fact, God’s salvation for these men was so complete that not **“a hair of their heads [was] singed”** – the hair usually being the first thing burned as a body gets near a fire
 - e. furthermore, **“their robes were not scorched”** – even though they were highly flammable
 - f. finally, **“there was no smell of fire on them”** – a scent that is near nigh impossible to avoid when in close proximity to a fire

- g. we are reminded of **(Is 43:2b, “When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.”)**
- h. by a miracle, God saved Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the blazing furnace
- i. as Nebuchadnezzar unwittingly said **(3:28, “Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego...”)**

C. Application to our lives

- 1. a source of comfort and courage for us
 - a. God’s miraculous rescue of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego can serve as a source of comfort and courage for us
 - b. as the Final Day approaches our feet will increasingly be put to the fire
 - c. we will be pressured to compromise our beliefs, violate God’s holy will, and deny the true God
 - d. and we may be punished if we fail to do so
 - e. it’s already happening in our day
 - f. in some shootings of recent memory, the shooter has asked people if they believe in God or Jesus
 - g. those who responded in the affirmative, who did not deny God, were shot
 - h. and we think of ISIS – they tell people to renounce Christ and if they do not they are summarily executed
 - i. such pressure will increase and such persecution will mount against us as the world draws to its close
 - j. what will we do when our feet are put to the fire or a gun is put to our head?
 - k. we can remember the example of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego
 - l. we will entrust ourselves and our lives to God’s will
 - m. trusting that he has the power to save us
 - n. or, if it is his will, to take us to be with him should such persecution bring about our death
 - o. and we will remember that God always has his angels, his commandos, near us and fighting for us, to keep us safe and sound
- 2. law and gospel
 - a. and for those times when we have failed or will fail to remain faithful to our God
 - b. because of the threat of embarrassment, ostracism, criticism, or ridicule
 - c. and have earned for ourselves a place in the burning fire of hell

- d. we beg our God’s forgiveness on account of our Savior Jesus
- e. who was never unfaithful to his Father
- f. but was faithful to him even in the face of his own death
- g. a death which has washed all our sins away
- h. and rescued us from the blazing fire of hell
- i. for the eternal light of god’s presence forever in heaven
- j. **(1Co 15:57, “But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”)**

Concl: May our God give us the strength and courage of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego as we face persecution for our faith so that we might always say, ‘We must obey God rather than men.’