

THE KING OF KINGS

DANIEL 3

OUR KING COMMANDS US



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

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JANUARY 31, 2021 (PM)

INTRODUCTION

Cancel culture is a movement that shames, ostracizes, and punishes people for saying or doing something considered offensive to our cultural overlords. Cancellation usually involves issues of sexuality, gender, race, or climate. Various people on both the right and the left, in business and entertainment, in education and technology, have been cancelled for having the 'wrong' opinions in these areas (e.g. J K Rowling, Megan Kelly, Josh Hawley, Donald Trump). Our culture has set up idols of gender identity, sexual preference, climate change, and racial wokeness, and called us to bow before their ideas in these areas, or else. Will we bow or refuse to bow? Daniel 3 gives us our response: **They can cancel but we'll be faithful.**

BACKGROUND

Theme of Daniel: The King of kings is still King

Structure of Daniel:

- Faithful Living in Hostile Times (1-6)
- Forward Looking in Hostile Times (7-12)

Story so far

- Be faithful because our King Cares for us (Daniel 1)
- Be faithful because our King Communicates with us (Daniel 2:1-30)
- Be faithful because our King Conquers for us (Daniel 2:31-49)
- Be faithful because our King Commands us (Daniel 3)

Daniel's three friends were threatened by cancel culture in Daniel 3. Despite honoring God at the end of the previous chapter, King Nebuchadnezzar went on to dishonor God by building a 90-foot-high golden statue (probably of himself) and commanding everyone who attended its inauguration to bow to the image when the music started (1-5). Anyone who refused was to be thrown into a burning fiery furnace (6-7). Will the three men bow or refuse to bow? Their heavenly king commanded faithfulness, but their earthly king commanded unfaithfulness. Their heavenly kings said, "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth (Ex. 20:3-5). Their earthly king said, "Bow down and worship my idol." What will they do? Who will they obey? Will they be faithful or unfaithful to God? If faithful, how?



How can we be faithful in such an unfaithful world?
Faithfulness is full of faith.



1. FAITHFULNESS IS FULL OF FAITH (1-18)

We believe God is able to deliver us (16-17)

Thousands and thousands had gathered for the inauguration of the statue. The crowds stretched for miles on the plains of Dura. When the music started, the multitudes bowed to the idol. All expect for three solitary figures who remained standing: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. The Babylonian civil servants saw their opportunity to regain the powerful positions they had lost to these three men and informed on them (12).

The King hauled them in for interrogation and asked, **"Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up?"** (14). He gave them one more chance to worship the idol and warned them, **"If you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?"** (15).

The three friends answered, **"O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter** (16). They didn't need to think about how to answer. They didn't need legal advice. They didn't explain themselves, apologize, make excuses or false promises. **Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king** (17). They had refused to eat food offered to idols (Daniel 1), which had prepared them for this greater and more public trial (Daniel 3).

We believe God even if God does not deliver us (18)

"But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up" (18). 'Compromise' was not in their vocabulary. Pleasing God was more important to them than their own lives. Better die early and face God in peace than live longer and face him in anger. They knew they ought to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). God's commands were their responsibility, the consequences were God's. Whatever happens, right is right and wrong is wrong. Dale Ralph Davis wrote:

These men give us then a full-balanced picture of faith: faith knows the power of God (he is able, 17), guards the freedom of God (but if not..., 18a), and holds the truth of God (we will not serve your gods, 18b).

The lead singer of *MercyMe*, Bart Millard, explained that his song *Even If* was inspired by these verses in Daniel as he tried to process his son's lifelong battle with diabetes.



"The song 'Even If' is incredibly special to me," Millard wrote. "My son, Sam, is 15 years old, and he's been a diabetic since he was 2. When you're a parent of a child with any kind of chronic illness, these things don't go away. You have a lot of good days, but some days you feel like you're losing bad. I was in the midst of one of those bad days when 'Even If' was written. I know what God is capable of but even if He doesn't come through, He is still my hope because of what He's already done, not what the circumstances are doing to me. If nothing else, He's the only thing that has prepared me for the circumstance." The song, *Even If*, was inspired by this passage in Daniel." The song goes like this:

They say it only takes a little faith
To move a mountain
Well good thing
A little faith is all I have, right now
But God, when You choose
To leave mountains unmovable
Oh give me the strength to be able to sing
It is well with my soul

I know You're able and I know You can
Save through the fire with Your mighty hand
But even if You don't
My hope is You alone
I know the sorrow, and I know the hurt
Would all go away if You'd just say the word
But even if You don't
My hope is You alone

Millard concluded: "Even If" is a reminder to people in difficult situations that don't seem to go away. This song is a declaration to God that even if He went silent and never said another word, He's still worthy to be praised and that He's our greatest hope in the midst of the trial," he testified."

CHANGE YOUR STORY WITH GOD'S STORY

Increase faithfulness by increasing faith.

We can't become more faithful by trying harder but by trusting better. Greater faith will produce greater faithfulness.

Leave consequences with God. Our focus should be God's commands not the possible fallout of obeying them. Calculation is not the path to sanctification.

THEY CAN CROSS US OUT
BUT WE'RE OUT FOR THE CROSS



What reaction can we expect from the faithless?
Fury!



2. FAITHFULNESS INFURIATES THE FAITHLESS (19-23)

A Furious King (19)

Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (19).

The friends refused to bow to the statue of the King and to the fury of the King. They were facing the fury of one of the most tyrannical dictators in world history. Yet they refused to bend the knee. There's nothing that angers atheists more than faith.

A Furious Furnace (19-23)

He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated. And he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace. Because the king's order was urgent and the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace (19-23).

The King's anger was reflected in the furnace being heated up so much that it incinerated the guards. Still the three friends would not bow. They chose to anger the King rather than the King of kings. They chose a temporary human fire rather than an eternal divine fire.

CHANGE YOUR STORY WITH GOD'S STORY

Prepare for the furnace. We may not face a terrifying tyrant or a fiery furnace, but if we're faithful we will face human fury and human cancellation. We may experience the fire of mockery, ostracism, scorn, demotion, and so on. Paul warned us to prepare for persecution: Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (2 Tim. 3:12).

Remember Christ's sufferings. He was full of faith, full of faithfulness, and therefore experienced the full fire of human and devilish rage. Hebrews 11:34 indicates that the three men faced and quenched the fire by faith in Christ. They looked ahead and believed that the Christ who would suffer flames for them could quench flames for them.

IF WE CARRY THE CROSS
WE'LL MAKE OTHERS CROSS



Is the cost worth it?
Yes, because God rewards the faithful.



3. FAITHFULNESS WILL BE REWARDED (24-30)

The three men were rewarded for their faithfulness in three ways.

The Reward of God with Us (24-25)

Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king." He answered and said, "But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods."

Who is this mysterious fourth figure? As far as the King is concerned, he was "like a son of the gods" (25), later calling him an angel sent from God (28). He didn't know exactly who this was but realized this was a divine figure and sent by God with a message for the three men (angel means literally 'messenger'). We know from other Old Testament passages that God frequently sent his Son, the second person of the Trinity, in human form to his needy people on earth. He appeared to Hagar, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, and many others as the Angel of the Lord (lit. Messenger of the Lord). The Son of God came down in human form (not 'flesh') to walk with these three Christ-like men suffering for Christ's sake. What an amazing conversation that must have been as they walked around untouched by the fire and touched by the presence of God.

The Reward of God Glorified (26-29)

Having issued a decree against God, the King now issues a decree for God. **"Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God. Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way" (26-29).**

The Reward of God's Promotion (30)

Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon (30).

CHANGE YOUR STORY WITH GOD'S STORY

God with us. As we go into the world with the Gospel, we will face suffering, but we are promised Christ's presence with us (Matt. 28:19-20).

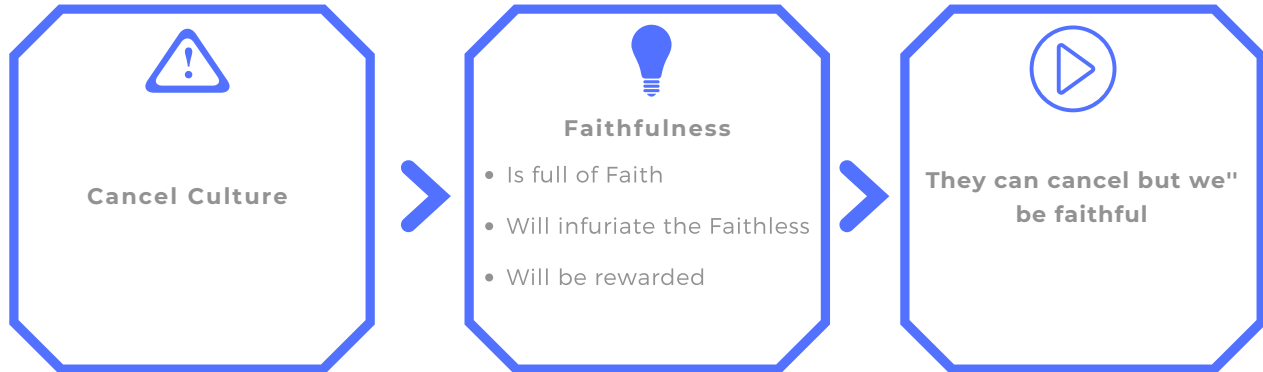
Those who honor me I will honor (1 Sam 2:30). The promotion may not come in this world but it will in the world to come.

COUNT THE COST
AND COUNT THE PROFIT

Hear God's Story > Change your story > Tell a new story



CONCLUSION



PRAYER: Our Commander, help us to be faithful to your commands no matter the consequences of cancellation. Amen.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Give some examples of cancel culture that you are aware of.
2. Give an example of a time you obeyed God regardless of consequences.
3. How can you apply "Even If" in your life?
4. Why do you think faith infuriates the faithless so much?
5. When have you seen your faithfulness rewarded and how?
6. How do you think Christ ministered to them men in the fiery furnace? What kinds of things might he have said to them?

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