

Total Trust in difficult circumstances

→ Daniel 3:1-30

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A. Introduction¹

Brothers and Sisters,
Best regards from your brothers and sisters in Germany. Especially from my church,
...

It's a privilege for me to share the gospel with you. I hope that God, our heavenly father, will bless and encourage you this morning.

I want to preach about a story which is written in my favourite book of the Old Testament: in the book of Daniel. The story happened long, long ago. Around 2600 years. But the message of this story will challenge us today.

Why are we looking in the Old Testament? Because the bible is the word of God. And we can read in the Old Testament stories about people. People, who lived their lives with God. People, who experienced God. The Bible is a book which shows us experienced life from human beings with God. How they lived with God? How they talked to God? How they were witnesses for God? We can learn from them. The apostle Paul writes in **Romans 15:4** (NIV):

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

Some are bad role models for us. Some people are good role models for us. If we look in the Old Testament we get new hope. Hope for today. Hope for our daily live from Monday to Saturday.

Today we want to look at a few young men, who are very good role models for us. 2600 years ago lived four young guys who could encourage us. They lived their daily live under special circumstances. Like us.

B. The historical situation of the guys

¹ In this script I don't name the sources. The sources are named in the German version of this script.

The four guys were Jews. They lived in a foreign country, in Babylon. Babylon is today an area of the Iraq. The situation in Judah and Jerusalem was not the best these days. The king in Jerusalem was a bad king and God sent Nebuchadnezzar to punish his people. Around 605 before Christ Nebuchadnezzar appeared the first time in Jerusalem. He took many prisoners from the upper circles and took them to Babylon. We can read in **Daniel, chapter 1, verse 1-2; 6 → read**.

The Babylonians had the habit to catch the best people of the occupied country. They bring them to Babylon as prisoners. Then they trained them and integrated them in the political systems. So they got the best brains from the occupied countries. They create a brain train.

Our guys lived now in a foreign country with a different religion. The people of Babylon believes in different idols. And the king of Babylon believes he was a God too. But the tough guys hold the ground. They want to obey the living God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Even in a foreign country under special circumstances. Maybe you know the stories about Daniel and his friends: Daniel in the lion cave. Or Daniel and the "Writing on the wall".

Today we want to read a story without Daniel. We don't know where he was in this very special moment of history². But his three friends were there. Let's read the scripture.

Reading: Daniel 3:1-30

Just Burmese Version.

Preaching: Total trust in difficult circumstances

This is a crazy story. We see three guys who resist against a very big crowd and against a very powerful king. Let's take a look at the details.

1. The King who wants total obedience: 1-11

1 King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.

2 Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

3 Then the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

4 And the herald proclaimed aloud, "You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages,

5 that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.

6 And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace."

7 Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, all the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

8 Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews.

9 They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever!

10 You, O king, have made a decree, that every man who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image.

11 And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace.

First we see a very powerful king who wants to be worshipped. It was 30m high and 3 meters broad. It was enormous. In chapter 2 the bible told us, that Nebuchadnezzar had a dream. He dreamed of a big statue. Maybe this dream inspired him. His kingdom was labelled from Daniel as the golden kingdom. We don't know much about the statue. Maybe it was a kind of a pillar. Maybe it presented an idol.

² Maier supposed that Nebuchadnezzar didn't invite the court officials, because they were committed. He invited the provincial officials from all over the country to celebrate unity (Maier: 154; Asmussen 33).

Nebuchadnezzar invited the high society and the leaders of his country. This event was more than a political show. It was a religious event. It was all about worship. The Babylonian King was also a high priest for his people.

The other thing was that the King wanted to unite his kingdom. They all come together and they all have to worship.

And it was about “to be or not to be”. Who didn’t want to worship would be killed. This situation is an image or a preview of the situation in **Revelation 13,14**:

11 Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon.

12 It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence,³ and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed.

*13 It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people,
14 and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of⁴ the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived.*

15 And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain.

This situation is a model of an Antichristiccal circumstance. It will happen again at the end of this time period. But it could also happen before, again and again.

Different rulers used such a method to unite their country and to celebrate their power and their selves. The German ruler Hitler did it, in the so called Third Reich. These situations will come and go and come and go. But in every situation followers of the living God are called to withstand.

The trumpets sounded and the crowd bowed down. Everybody kneeled down. The event was a complete success.

But then we have a dramatic twist in our report. There were some accusers. They went to the king and reimbursed advertisements. They made a report. And I think they were jealous of the Jews, too. And they wanted to impress their king. Right?

2. The guys who serve the living God: 12-18

12 But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up.”

13 Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king,

14 and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up?

15 Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?”

They reported that three guys of the province Babel - the most important province, didn’t worship. These three young men resisted. They didn’t bow down. They didn’t do that. They couldn’t make it. There was no chance. They stand and looked all over the crowd. What a scenery. What? Why?

Because this three young men knew the word of God. They knew what God wanted. They knew about the first commandment. In **Exodus 20,21** is written:

1 And God spoke all these words:

2 “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

3 “You shall have no other gods before¹ me.

4 “You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.

5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me,

They knew the scripture. But they didn't only know it. They wanted to live with it. They had a deep conviction, that their God is real. In Germany we have a phrase: Schönwetter-Christen. "Nice-Weather-Christians". If the weather is nice, everything is all right. But if the weather changes and times get harder, then they will decide for convenience. The three guys weren't "Nice-Weather-Followers". They hold their ground. They stand. With all the bad consequences which were now follow.

Of course, the king is angry. Very angry. He wants unity around an idol and three important officers resist. He mentored and raised these three guys up and now they didn't follow his order. But the king gave them a second chance. This is a crucial moment. A German bible scholar says (Maier:157):

"This moment is the most dangerous in the whole chapter. When one comes to faithfulness with love and benevolence, it becomes much more difficult for us to remain firm. Seduction is always more dangerous than persecution. The temptation increases to the temptation. The choice of the three friends is as follows: To accomplish externally what Nebuchadnezzar demands and what one must not inwardly affirm, or fire death."

They were at this very moment in a very special test of faith. But they remained clear. They wanted to obey God in this very special circumstance. The guys gave a very powerful answer. The answer is amazing. What a great statement: → **read**

16 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 us³ 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."

We see total trust in difficult circumstances. This is bold faith. And we can see three great characters. In it is a decision of absolute freedom. They risk everything for God: Career, reputation, life. No compromise! This is, what Paul in **Romans 12,1-2** says:

1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

And I want to be honest. It would have been so easy for them to do what the king demands. It would have been so understandable. Made this resistant sense. Makes their decision really sense? Did God need this heroic decision? There was no way to stop the ceremony and they couldn't stop the worshipping of the idol.

But they thought in a complete different direction. They had a close relationship to the living God. To the Lord. They didn't decide for others. They decided for themselves. They did it stopped for themselves. They did it for the Lord. They knew about the presence of the one and only, of the Lord. He knew about the audience of one. He saw her decision. They didn't want to offend God's honour. So they didn't do it. They couldn't do it. They trusted in the Lord. These guys are role-models for us!

It comes, as it must. Their decision was unacceptable for the king. In his eyes it was blasphemy against his idols.³

3. The living God who saves his servants and receives the honour

read: 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.

The king went crazy. He was furious. The oven must have stood nearby. Maybe it was an oven for bricks. Babylon was a country which produced bricks in these days. The final moment came. The courage of the three guys didn't seem to be rewarded. And this we know from the first Christians also. Many Christians died as martyrs. And even today many Christians die as martyrs. They don't give up their faith.

read: 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."

Incredible! God did a miracle. He sent another man in the oven. But who was this man? An angel? Some bible scholars mean that it was Christ himself. However. It was a miracle. God came into the natural world with supernatural power. King Nebuchadnezzar saws in the four men representatives of the eternal kingdom of God. He called them out of the oven. He examined their clothes. Nothing! They didn't even smell smoke. Not at all. And he confessed:

read: 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.

29 Therefore I decree that **the people of any nation** or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way."

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

God received the glory from a pagan king. What a mighty message for all oppressed Jews at this time. And what a mighty message for us today. Because of the resistance of these three guys God received the glory.

E. Conclusion and Call: Live like the guys and God gets the honour

These three guys are role-models for us. And I suggest: let us take these guys as role models for our daily Christian lives.

Jesus told us in **Matthew 5:14-16**:

14 "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.

³ „Der König ist verpflichtet, die Verachtung der Staatsgötter und die Einführung neuer Götter zu verhindern, da beides den Staat gefährdet, weil diese Gottheiten Schutz- und Rettungsgötter sind, die nicht erzürnt werden dürfen.“ (Lebram: 63)

15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.

16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

You are a follower of Jesus. Let your light shine. Do good works, because people need to see good works and then they will glorify the father in heaven.

What kind of follower are you? Are you a “Nice-Weather-Follower”? Are you a “Lamp-under-the-bowl-Follower”?

Or do you want to be a “Light tower-Follower”? Our three guys were light towers. They stand when everybody kneel down to worship the idol. They have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back!

But I know from my own life, that I sometimes failed. God’s grace is bigger and mightier than my fail. For me it is important to stand up again and walk with the Lord. I need the correction and orientation from God’s word. It does encourage me. This is what the Writer of Hebrews wrote in **chapter 11,33f**:

And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets,

33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions,

34 quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.

And later on, in **12,1**:

1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us,

2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

I have decided, to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back. What we need trust in God. We need power to resist against the modern idols: materialism, money, safety, career, sex. All these things come from God, but they aren’t God.

Let’s live different. Let’s live as a “Light Tower Follower”. We have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back, no turning back. In every circumstances. Based on his grace!

Amen