

**Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. <sup>17</sup> If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. <sup>18</sup> But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”**

**<sup>19</sup> 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 <sup>20</sup> and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. <sup>21</sup> So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. <sup>22</sup> 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, <sup>23</sup> and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.**

**<sup>24</sup> 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, O king.”**

**<sup>25</sup> 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.”**

**<sup>26</sup> 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, <sup>27</sup> 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.**

**<sup>28</sup> 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. (NIV84)**

Theme: God’s Power comes through Grace Alone.

1. His power rescues us from our enemies.
2. His grace is given through the pure gospel.

Both stories are remarkable. One—from the Bible, you know quite well. The other, you may know also. The one took place about 2600 years ago. The Babylonians went into Jerusalem and took many captives into exile. They chose some of the most promising young men to raise and train them for the benefit of the king, Nebuchadnezzar. Some time later Nebuchadnezzar built a large golden statue—about 90 feet tall and 9 feet wide. He then commanded everyone in Babylon that when they heard music being played they had to bow down and worship this golden image. And those that didn’t would be thrown into a fiery furnace. But three men, Hananiah, Misahael, and Azariah, better known by their Babylonian names—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow down to the statue. They knew what the punishment was for not following the King’s command. But they would have rather been burned to death for not following the king’s command than to burn for eternity for not following God’s command. Nebuchadnezzar found out about their disobedience. So he brought them in and questioned them. He was also ready to give them a second chance to obey him—this is where our text picks up the story.

Together Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied to the king, **we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter.** It’s a remarkable reply. Here they were standing before the king who raised, nourished, educated them, and gave them high positions in his country—and they refused to obey him. They were supposed to be loyal to him, instead, they showed him up in front of everyone. How could these three men be so bold? Because they knew the power of God. **If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.** The three men knew that God’s power comes through his grace. The LORD—the only true God, had the power to save them if he wanted to. But even if he didn’t want to—even if he wasn’t going to

save them, they still would not bow down to that false god and break the first commandment.

And you know what happened next. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were bound and forced into a furnace that was burning seven times hotter than normal. It was so hot that it killed the strong soldiers who threw them in. Nebuchadnezzar took a seat in the front with all of his officials so he could watch these Jewish rebels burn to death. But to his amazement, he saw them walking around in the furnace. And it wasn't just three men, but four. God sent an angel to protect and free Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Fast forward about 2100 years—and move from the Middle East to Europe. In June of 1520 Pope Leo X issued a Papal Bull, or edict that Martin Luther was a heretic. It hadn't quite been four years since this young professor and former monk nailed 95 theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. These theses condemned the practice of the sale of indulgences, which promised the removal of punishment in purgatory for an exchange of money. In the years that followed Luther wrote much about the pure gospel and against false doctrine. As a result he was labeled a heretic or false teacher, by the Pope. And if he didn't recant, or take back, what he wrote, he would be excommunicated from the Catholic Church and considered and outlaw. They gave Luther 60 days to respond and they burned all of Luther's books. In December Luther responded by burning the edict. As a result Luther was excommunicated early in January of 1521. Then things stated coming to a head. Charles V became the new Emperor. He wanted to meet with all the German nobility because he wanted their help in the war against the Turks—or Muslims. Part of the agenda at this nearly four-month-long assembly was Martin Luther—and he was summoned to attend.

He arrived in the city of Worms in April of 1521. In the evening of April 18<sup>th</sup>, Luther stood before Emperor Charles V, the heir of the 1100 year throne of the Holy Roman Empire. A catholic official asked Luther two questions: Are these your books, and do you recant, or take back, your teachings. Luther was taken aback. He was expecting to debate, not answer a pointed question like this. He asked for a day to think about his answer. The next evening they asked him the same questions again. Luther responded that they were his books and that he had written more. And that there were three types of books that he

wrote—one all Christians, even the Catholics agreed with, so he couldn't recant, those. Other books that he wrong he speaks the truth as taught by the gospel, so he couldn't in good conscience recant those. And in the third set of books, he said he may have attacked some people a little too harshly. He was then pressed to give a clear, straight-up answer: Do you recant your teachings? Luther responded with what is printed on the front of our bulletin this morning. "Unless I can be instructed and convinced with evidence from the Holy Scriptures or with open, clear, and distinct grounds and reasoning—and my conscience is captive to the Word of God—then I cannot and will not recant, because it is neither safe nor wise to act against conscience. Here I stand I can do no other. God help me. Amen." Luther's statement before the Emperor and against the Pope put his life in danger. He left the assembly an outlaw. The Pope and thus the Emperor wanted him dead. They put a bounty on his head. They condemned him to hell. But God kept Luther safe. He led a group of Luther's followers to kidnap him while traveling through Germany. He was kept in seclusion at the Wartburg Castle. Through the rest of his life, God kept Luther safe. Even though it was illegal for anyone to give Luther shelter or food, and it was perfectly legal to kill Luther, he was always well taken care of and died a natural death in 1546.

Two great stories. But how do they apply to us? No one is threatening to throw us into a fiery furnace if we refused to bow down to a false god. No one has put a bounty on our head, labeled us an outlaw, or made it illegal for anyone to take care of us. We may not be killed for our faith like many Christians are today throughout the world. But we still face our fair share of persecution. It comes from the neighbor down the street who mocks you for giving up your time, talents, and treasures for Christ. It comes from co-workers who can't get over the fact that you believe that someone rose from the dead, that God created the world in six days, and that you reject the theory of evolution. It may even come from the government. In Canada it is now illegal—considered a hate-crime, to say anything bad about homosexuality. Individuals in our own government want to force employers, even some connected to religions, to provide abortive contraceptives to their employees. Because of the persecution we face, we may be tempted to give in. To avoid all trouble and persecution, and go along with the world. Or perhaps the persecution gets stronger

and stronger against you. You feel all alone, that you are fighting this battle all by yourself and that God has left and abandoned you.

At times like these we know we have a God of power. Like the three men, we know that our God can save us—to stop those who persecute us. And even if he doesn't we still will not go against his Word. We know that God often does save us from persecution. In his grace, he often chooses to save us who are helpless to save ourselves. But he doesn't always decide to do this. The pages of history are filled with instances when God chose not to save those who were being persecuted. But if he wants to he can.

And if he doesn't, that is fine with us too. For even if he doesn't stop our earthly enemies from doing us harm, he has stopped our spiritual enemies. The devil can do no harm to us. Even if we are put to death for our faith, we will still live forever with Christ. For he has defeated our spiritual enemy. He accomplished this by living a perfect life for us. And when he died on the cross he took all our sins upon himself. He took the condemnation our sins deserved upon himself and he gave us his perfect life. So that when God looks at us he doesn't see sinners who deserve damnation. When Christ died Satan thought that he had won. But three days later Christ rose from the dead. He crushed Satan's head. Christ did all of this for us through his grace alone. He lived, suffered, and died for us, not because we earned or deserved it. He didn't do this for us because we were great people. Rather it was grace—God's undeserved love for sinners, that Christ forgave our sins and gave us eternal life. It is his grace and his grace alone that saves us.

God has power over sin, death, and the devil. It was grace that moved him to make use of this power. It was his grace that saved us from our spiritual enemies. And we receive these gifts that Christ won for us through faith—which he also gives us. It is God's grace through faith that we are saved. And this is apart from anything we have done or can ever do.

God assures us of this through this gospel. His gospel alone. That is why we don't want to change the gospel. That is why we defend the gospel in its truth and purity. For if the gospel is changed at all, we no longer have the gospel. For if we add our works to God's grace, then it is no longer by grace. If we say that we are saved by God's grace

plus what we do, then we are saved by what we do. If we say that God's grace allows us to do good works, by which we are ultimately saved, then we reject God's grace. If we lose the gospel we lose eternal life. If we rely on anything other than God's grace through Christ alone to be saved, then we will not be saved.

That is why we insist on the pure, unadulterated Word. It is through the pure gospel that Christ saves us. Without the gospel we cannot be saved. Through it alone we learn of what Christ has done for us. Through it alone he brings us to faith. It is through his Supper that he gives us his true body and blood in, with, and under the bread and the wine for the forgiveness of sins. He graciously gives to us a tangible forgiveness as we partake of the very thing he gave up to save us.

Without the gospel, we don't have God's grace. That is why it is so important to cling to the pure Word of God. Can you imagine what would have happened if the three men didn't cling to God's Word? They would have been just fine. Nebuchadnezzar never would have gotten angry at them. They never would have been thrown into the fiery furnace. But they also would have sinned against the first commandment. They would have bowed down and worshiped a false god. And unless they repented and turned back to God, they would have perished. They would have saved their lives, but lost eternal life. For they would have rejected God's grace.

Luther too. Luther could have caved. He was under a lot of pressure from both sides. But what would have happened if Luther would have recanted on what the Bible teaches? He would have given the ok to sell the forgiveness of sins through indulgences. He would have said that the Pope was the head of the Church—that he had the authority to punish all who didn't follow him. He would have given the Pope the right and the privilege to decide what the Bible says, and make new teachings. He would have said the Pope was Christ's substitute on earth. But worst of all, Luther would have been saying that salvation doesn't come from grace alone through faith by the merit of Christ alone. He would have said that we must also do good works to be saved.

If Luther caved in, he would have saved his life. But he would have lost his faith. And he would have caused many others to lose their faith as well. He would have led them astray. He would have led

them away from the pure gospel. If Luther caved, we wouldn't be here today. And we would be on our way to eternal damnation.

That is why Luther insisted on the pure gospel. That is why he insisted that God's Word be kept in its truth and purity. Many souls were at stake. And so we too strive to keep God's Word in its truth and purity. Our eternal lives are at stake. For any false doctrine is detrimental to our faith. And so is any sin. That is why we why worship him every week. That is why we regularly partake of his Holy Supper. That is why we study his Word at home and in Bible Class. We want to be strengthened in our faith. We want to grow in the knowledge of his pure Word.

So we remain committed to God's pure Word. If we depart from the pure gospel grace can be lost. And with it saving faith. So we commit ourselves to the hearing and learning of the Word. We recommit ourselves to the pure teaching of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone. And we know that when we do we may face persecution. But that doesn't matter—for God has the power to protect and save us.

Two remarkable stories that show us that God's power comes through grace alone. His power saves us from our enemies. And his grace comes to us through the gospel. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego knew this. So did Luther. Because they stayed true to God's word, we know it too. So like Luther we insist on the truth that we are saved by God's grace alone. Amen.