

Committed

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- [0 : 0 0] This morning, if you have your Bible, turn with me to the book of Daniel, chapter three, and we're gonna look at a few verses, beginning in verse 13, we're gonna read verses 13 to 18, and then we're gonna focus just on three verses, verses 16, 17, and 18, in just a few moments.
- And I wanna preach, as the theme of the morning is today, this entire day, about committed, being committed. I hope you recognize, I'm sure you do, there is a big, big difference in saying that you're committed to something, we call that profession, and actually being committed to something, right?
- There's a huge difference in what I say sometimes and what we sometimes see acted out in life. I can't tell you how many times as a pastor I've stood at a wedding altar and gone through vows with folk and heard them, sometimes they request to do their own vows, and they read these lofty statements or have them memorized about how they're gonna be soulmates forever, and they're gonna always share everything, and they're gonna be trustworthy.
- And of course, the traditional vows, you know how that goes, about in sickness and in death, in joy and in sorrow, and prosperity and adversity. And we make these promises and say, man, you are the one for life.
- And believe it or not, I've seen some of those contracts ended literally in seven weeks. I've seen many of them fall by the wayside in less than five years.
- [1 : 4 1] And sadly, many, many of them, by the time they reach 10 years or 20 years, they've just said, you know, we're gonna have to call it quits, and we're gonna go our way.
- And I don't mean this to put guilt on anyone here who might be in this category. I don't say it for that reason. But I've even seen folk at times make that commitment not once, but twice and three and four, and as many as five times.
- I've known folk who've just been married innumerable times, and they make that same promise. And sometimes the ending of those marriages really and truly wasn't their fault.
- But it's pretty obvious that we don't take seriously sometimes the commitment that we make with our mouths. Isn't that right? Those of you who are football fans know that every year, guys, toward the end of the school year, they begin to make commitments to universities, to Clemson, to Furman, to South Carolina or Alabama or whatever school.
- And then once the season gets underway or is about to get underway, they're about to go to college, they seemingly have a change of mind and heart, and they break those commitments and end up playing somewhere else.
- [2 : 5 3] Or they go that first year, and they discover they're not gonna be on the field that first season, and so they back away, and they sign with another school after they have met the requirement, the NCAA.
- They recommit to another school. And of course, we've seen it in church as well, right? When I first started pastoring back in 1977, if you were someone who was committed to the church, you know the word we used then?

We don't hear much about this word anymore. We called it faithful. We would say, that person is a faithful church member. And of course, there was a slogan that went along with that, and most of you in here who are my age or a little bit younger even, you know that expression.

We used to say about those people, they're here when? Every time the doors are open, right? That's what it required to be faithful. You were there Sunday morning, and those are the days we had Sunday night and Wednesday night and Tuesday or Thursday night visitation, or they engaged in other ministries of the church, and we said, those are the faithful few, right?

Well, about 20 years ago, I began to recognize that the definition, practically speaking, for faithful had changed. This is long before I left the pastorate on a full-time basis.

[4 : 16] And I began to notice, and I heard ministers say, and even heard it from the mouths of members, that really and truly, if you showed up once or twice a month, you could be considered faithful because you were maintaining some type of tie with the church, right?

I want to show you a picture this morning. When you see this picture in scripture, you're going to go away saying, man, that is what committed is all about. There won't be any argument about, well, these guys were faithful, and they were committed in their relationship with God.

Let me set the stage before I read the passage. It's the year 586 B.C. shortly thereafter, okay? Nebuchadnezzar has marched into the city of Jerusalem in Judah for the third and last final time.

Before he's left devastation in his path, but this time, he utterly destroys Jerusalem. The walls that have protected the city, they're torn down.

They'll stay that way for 70 years. The scripture tells us that he killed literally thousands of folk. He ransacks the temple, desecrates the temple.

[5 : 38] His soldiers go in and take out the golden and silver vessels. They spit literally on the religious life of the land of Judah.

He leaves nothing behind but the crippled, the maimed, and the elderly. He takes the brightest and the best, and he transports them from Jerusalem back to Babylon.

He has plans for these young men. He's going to incorporate them into an administrative program, teach them Babylonian culture, and make them productive citizens of his kingdom.

Among those who were enlisted in that program are four names you will recognize, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Well, they make it in this program.

They're faring well, and sometime afterward, Nebuchadnezzar, an egomaniac, by all rights, comes up with this idea. He's going to establish a god of gold, place it in the plain of Dura, and at a certain time, music is going to sound, and he demands that all of his subjects bow down and worship this god of gold.

[6 : 52] Now, obviously, he knows if he's the one who has had the idea of this god, and he's the one who has commissioned the building of this god, and he is the one who has issued the order that all subjects bow and worship this god of gold, the chunk of gold in Dura is not really the god.

Who's the god? He's the god, right? It's all about people obeying him and worshiping him and doing what he tells them to do.

Well, the Bible tells us that there were some who refused to bow and worship this god of gold, and that's where we pick up our Bible reading this morning.

Look with me to Daniel chapter 3, and we're reading from verse 13 and following. Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage, you know why he's furious?

He could not believe that anybody would defy him. Look, he's the most powerful man from the human perspective living on the planet at this moment in time, and he well knows that.

[8 : 00] He's furious, enraged, and commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, is it true?

He can't believe it. 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? Now if you're ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music to fall down and worship the image that I have made well and good.

But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning, fiery furnace. Listen to this next statement. And who is the God who will deliver you from my hands?

Now that's arrogance, isn't it? And who is the God that can deliver you out of my hands? He's not asking because he wants information.

That's a rhetorical question of the highest order. In his mind, there's not a God. You see, he's already conquered a lot of neighboring nations.

[9 : 16] And those nations had God. And those people in those nations appealed to their God. But God wasn't able to help them. In fact, the truth is the people of Judah, some of them, no doubt men like these in the story, they had appealed to God.

God, save us. Don't let this happen. Let us repent. We know this is because of our own wrongdoing. But God, spare us somehow. And so Nebuchadnezzar is just reminding them, you prayed once and God didn't rescue you.

And so if you are counting on him to come to your aid now and rescue you from this fire, you had better think again.

Look at verse 16. We see the response. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.

Now look up and listen for a second. If you hadn't already read this story, would you have ever anticipated that response? I mean, to be honest, you're looking in the face of an angry man.

[10 : 27] The Bible tells us in other verses, the veins in his neck were protruding, his face was as red as fire. He'd ordered that the furnace be heated seven times hotter than normal and they could look in his eyes until he meant business.

This is a rather curt response, wouldn't you say? To the most powerful man on the face of the earth, we have no need to answer you in this matter. Verse 17. If this be so, 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.

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.

Would you bow with us this morning in prayer? Father, I pray today that you would give us an insight into the commitment of these three Hebrew men.

I pray, Father, that their fate this morning would challenge us to be more committed for we make this prayer in Christ's name and for his sake alone. Amen.

[11 : 42] This morning, I want you to examine with me for just a few moments their response because there are three things about their response that I think absolutely indicate the reality of their faith and their commitment to God.

The first thing I'd have you to notice is this. they acted instinctively on their convictions. Now, I don't know if you're somebody who takes notes or not, but if you do, I want to encourage you to write that down.

These three points this morning are all rather short and I'd encourage you to write that down. Here's how you know the reality of their faith and their level of commitment. They acted instinctively on their convictions.

You say, Pastor, what do you mean? Their response in verse 16 is a clear indication. They were saying Nebuchadnezzar to Nebuchadnezzar the following. Nebuchadnezzar, we don't need to think about this.

We don't need to pray about this. We don't need to go and consult a rabbi about this. We don't need to convene a Jewish caucus. We don't need to consult with anybody.

[12 : 53] We don't need any time to rationalize about our answer. In fact, we don't even need to talk to you about this any longer because it's a foregoing conclusion. One translation has it this way, we're not careful to answer thee in this matter, O king.

In other words, our minds are made up and the only way their minds can be made up at this point, having just been challenged and recognizing he means business, is that they're acting on instinct and that instinct is based on previous convictions that they have come to hold.

I want to tell you something. I hope every person in this room is living on the basis of convictions that you have processed and accepted into your life because I want to tell you something.

If you wait until you're there in the face of trial, you're likely to make the wrong decision. They said, we don't need to think about it, we don't need to pray about it.

How many times have you ever said when you knew something was wrong already? Well, let me pray about that. It's a way of buying time, right? But they don't need to pray about it. You know why? Because from the time they were little bitty boys growing up in Jerusalem, their parents had raised them on what were known as the ten words.

[14 : 13] I hope you were raised on the ten words. For the Jew, you know what that was? It was the ten commandments. From the time they could walk and they could talk, they had been taught this, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and him only shalt thou serve.

Thou shalt worship no graven images. They already had accepted that as fact and believed in their heart that if they were to be obedient to God that God existed and if they were to be obedient to him there could be room for no other God in their life.

So it was a foregone conclusion. You can ask all you want, you can threaten all you want, but our minds are made up. We know how we feel. We know what we believe.

We believe in the single God Jehovah Yahweh and we're going to worship he and he alone. Isn't it amazing at times how we know the right thing to do but we have trouble doing it?

I was asked to be on a panel years and years ago at Anderson University and it was a panel of preachers and professors and students and the question was how do we determine the will of God and when my time came to speak I remember clearly as though it were yesterday what I said.

[15 : 28] I said you know what I found in my life it's not too hard to know what God wants me to do the problem is in doing it. Isn't that true? About 99% of everything I'll ever encounter in life God has already told me in his word he's given me precepts and laws and commandments that hey here's how you act here's what you do I don't have to think about murdering somebody because I already know it's wrong I don't have to think about stealing I don't have to think about committing adultery I don't have to think about slandering or coveting my neighbor because already the scripture has given me conviction on which I'm able to build my life.

You know what I'm surprised I'm a little surprised that if these men had been Baptists like so many of us they might have said well you know what give us two days to get back with you on this.

I mean they'd have felt the heat of that furnace and they'd said well you know what maybe we should rethink this a little bit. I mean you're gracious you've given us a chance to comply with your orders maybe that's God opening a door.

Have you ever seen us do that kind of thing? Where we know clearly what we ought to do and clearly what is out of bounds and what is in bounds but we want to think about it and we want to pray about it and we want to find a rationale that we can somehow dress up spiritually and come away saying well maybe this is the will of God for my life.

In fact I know some folk who probably would have reasoned like this well you know what that idol of gold is just gold and it's not really God none of us really believe it's God and I can bow and I can bow I can ask we ask to the most powerful men in the world in terms of what he asked me to do but I don't have to really worship I mean I can just look at the God and I can bow and I can pretend to worship but I don't have to worship in my heart and so I really won't be worshipping God if I do what he asked me to do or they might have said well you know what God wants me to bring him glory in fact Isaiah had already said that that our purpose in life is to bring God glory and so he might have said well you know what God wants us to bring him glory and all my life I've lived to bring him glory but if I die I can't bring him glory so maybe God doesn't want me to die he wants me to live and go on bringing him glory right they'd have found perhaps a convenient way to do absolutely the right thing so it all boils down to this if we're to make right decisions in life we've got to have right convictions let me hastily ask you this what are your convictions about

[18:17] God you have any convictions about God are there things in your life that you believe about God and it doesn't matter what comes your way I'm not going to change those ideas because these are convictions that are founded upon truth that I've read and studied and been taught in the word of God and nothing is ever going to change that what are your convictions about God what are your convictions about marriage I mean every person here I'm telling you you better have some convictions about marriage that you can act on instinctively because I'm going to tell you something temptation in that realm of life will sneak up on you it'll come out of nowhere and if you don't already know what you believe and what you're committed to and have conviction about that you're going to fall prey to an adulterous relationship somewhere out there in the future what are your convictions about church do you have any convictions about church when you came here and you said I want to be a member at First Baptist

Church if you've come in the last 25 years I know that Fred Stone would have looked at you and said have you got a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ have you repented of your sin and trusted him as your savior and are you going to live for him and they may have asked you to sign the church covenant there's an understanding with most churches and I would take it here at First Baptist that if you come here you're not going to just have your name on the roll of the church that you're going to be actively involved that you're going to gather regularly for worship that you're going to be faithful in your tithes and offerings that you're going to use your gifts to the glory of God that this church might accomplish its mission what are your convictions about the church are you committed to the church so the first thing I'd have you notice is they acted instinctively on their convictions but there's a second thing I want you to notice they had a high view of God as being both able and active and both those words are important they had a very high view of

God our God is able and our God is active listen to what they said in verse 17 our God whom we serve is able to deliver us he is able to deliver us able indicates he is able to deliver us indicates he is active he is both able and he is active he is willing to intercede in our behalf I'm going to tell you something you may not agree with this morning but I believe with all my heart I'm right in the church in this day in which we're living in the United States at any rate we are suffering from a crisis of faith now I don't want to insult anyone here but I want to be straight with you today we're not certain anymore not in what we say but in how we practice our faith what we really do believe about

God there was a time when I was a boy I want to tell you I would go to prayer meetings cottage prayer meetings the church prayer meeting at my church and I would hear the leaders of our church and the men and women of our church pray and I want to tell you something I had a clear understanding when I listened to them pray as a little boy those people believe that God can and will answer they had a belief that God was able to do anything and so they asked him to do anything nothing was off limits and when I look at the heroes of faith in the scripture those men of God in the scripture in the biblical era that's what they believed about God they believed the exact same thing about God that Shadrach Meshach and Abednego believed about God our God is able David a teenage boy didn't go out to face a nine foot giant not believing God is able

Daniel one of these men's friends and cohorts did not allow himself to be thrown into a den of lions not believing God is able Moses didn't lead hundreds of thousands thousands of men and their families out of captivity in Egypt without believing our God is able to do anything but I've got to tell you today in the church whether we want to admit it or not we have a crisis of faith we're not exactly sure any longer that God is really able if you don't believe it listen to us pray what are you asking for we hardly ask him with faith and persistence to do the impossible right we want to make sure that we frame our prayers somewhere there in the realm where well that's probably doable for God we pray anemic prayers we pray what the biblical writers would consider namby pamby prayers ask God nothing kind of prayers you see it in how we deal with problems when someone in the church today is going through a struggle in their marriage what do we do we want to rush to get them to a marriage counselor we want to rush to get a book in their hand we want to attend a seminar if you hear me saying those things are bad you're hearing me wrong what I'm telling you is this there was a time when we knew our kids or our grandkids or people in our circle of friends was in trouble you know what we'd do we'd fall on our face and we'd say

[24:10] God save them God save their marriage God save our country God save our boys on the battlefield God do this God do that we weren't afraid to ask him because we had confidence our God is able I'm going to tell you something today if you could come to recapture that spirit and mentality in your mind and heart and come to a place that you believe that God is able it would absolutely revolutionize your spiritual life and your church's life amen if we could just come to see our God is able not only that our God is able but our God is active he not only can do it many of us today still think he can do it maybe intellectually but you know what we also think if we're honest that he's probably off hiding in the shadows and the wings there are a ton of

Christians today who have this kind of mentality God did some mighty things to begin with he created and framed the universe he put it all in motion and then guess what he did after the Bible had been written he just kind of meandered off to the sidelines and he's over here and he's hiding in the shadows and the wings and he's started the ball rolling but now it's just kind of left up to us and we're kind of on our own and we're doing our thing and maybe every blue moon he will intervene into our lives can I tell you that's not how the men of scripture thought and believed that's not the God they were committed to and that's the reason Elijah in first Kings 18 is not afraid to look up into the heavens and call down fire from God that's the reason he's not afraid to say God I'm begging you to show these people once and for all who you are and do it by sending down fire he believed that God who we should serve is one who is able and active in intervening in our lives on a daily basis do you believe that thirdly they were fully committed to God as Dabo

Sweeney likes to say they're all in look at verse 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 but if not now look up and listen you know what some of you are probably thinking right now if you're skeptical and you're reading the way I often am you're probably thinking their faith wavered a little bit there didn't it but if not in other words maybe he's not able to deliver no their faith didn't waver what they're expressing here is an understanding of how God moves and works and has worked and will continue to work in our world it is an expression of their confidence in the sovereignty of God their faith is not wavering when they say but if not in other words if he doesn't deliver us what they're saying is this that we have looked at human history and understand that

God is sovereign we don't call the shots he does and God is free to do whatever God desires to do and it may be that he desires to save us to prove to you he is God and if so to God be glory and we praise him but it may just be that God in his sovereign wisdom will recognize it would be better for us to perish in the fire as a proof of the reality of our faith and he will not rescue us but know this whether he rescues us or he doesn't rescue us we are committed to serving him and him alone I want you to understand something friend every time we pray God does not answer the way we desire that he would answer or hope perhaps that he would answer I want to show you a passage and I'm going to ask you to turn to this passage if you have a Bible you have a device that you can look a passage up I want you to read this because I'm almost through the message look with me to Hebrews chapter 11 it's one of my favorite passages in all the word of God and I don't care who you are here today if you're a member a visitor you want to read this passage on your own look with me to Hebrews 11 35 to 38 would you find that if you have a Bible or a device Hebrews 11 35 to 38 now while you're turning it up let me set the stage how many of you know Hebrews 11 well you've read a lot of times raise your hand real high if you're familiar with this a lot of you in the sermon that's what I suspected some people call it God's hall of fame some people call it God's who's who some have called it the roll call of faith because what he does here is my favorite verse is verse 6 where he says without faith it is impossible to please him because those who come to him must believe that he exists and he is the reward of those who diligently seek him it's a list of all the great people in the scripture of faith and people that God has rescued but wait a second we overlook these closing verses

I want you to look with me to verse 35 the middle of the verse and I want to read it for you some were tortured refusing to accept release so that they might rise again to a better life others suffered mocking and flogging and even chains and imprisonment they were stoned let that sink in they were sawn in two they were killed with the sword they went about in skins of sheep and goats destitute afflicted and mistreated of whom the world was not worthy wandering about in deserts and mountains and in dens and caves of the earth you know what it says look up and get this not everybody who walked with God was faithful to God God chose to rescue well some of them were sawn in two they were boiled in oil they were crucified upside down they were stoned to death they were run through with a sword they were beheaded many of them escaped to live lives that we would deem miserable living in caves among dead people they wandered and then the writer of Hebrews says the world was not worthy of faithful soldiers of the cross who gave their life to the Lord Jesus men and women of deep deep deep conviction and that's what

[31 : 26] Shadrach Meshach and Abednego were saying we don't know if he's going to rescue us or not we don't have question number one about his ability or that he could we just don't know his sovereign will so if we die we die if we live to God be the glory that's a picture of what commitment looks like right I pastored full time for 40 years 40 years I was on staff about four years prior to that I've been doing interims now four years so you do the quick math about 48 to 50 years I've been involved in ministry I can tell you without hesitation today what has discouraged me more than anything else in ministry it is not adversity from the enemy and it is not adversity from within I was fortunate I was always in situations where people loved me and cared for me and supported me so it wasn't that that's what you're thinking you know what it was you was seeing people who one day were on fire for God and six months later you couldn't have found them with a seeing eye dog I mean people who would just be so on fire and then so cold so apathetic people who drifted in church and out of church and to another church and another church and another church and another church people who were giving great testimonies of praises one day until tragedy struck or they lost their job or child went wayward or something happened or somebody disappointed them and then they just drifted away drifted away that was the most heartbreaking thing I dealt with the last 50 years of my life just trying to get my head around it when I was in

Statesville the year was 1978 or 9 I'd been at Western Avenue about two years there was a man and his wife in our congregation by the name of Bob Byrd his wife Shirley they had a 19 year old boy who was in the service he came home on leave they lived on Lake Norman he's in a boat by himself and they're going across Lake Norman and he's turned to the left watching skiers in an adjacent boat sadly he didn't notice a concrete embankment came out into the water and he hit it going really fast and the boat just disintegrated they fished his body out of the water called EMS rushed him to Charlotte Memorial Hospital I got a call early that evening went to their side we just prayed till about 2 in the morning God please save Mark about 2 in the morning Bob turns to me in faithful Christian says

Ralph you just need to go home you got to preach in the morning your hour from home go home I got my car went back home broken-hearted for my friend next day after I preached I went back to Charlotte by then he had begun to stabilize a little bit they thought well we think he's going to pull through we're not certain next 48 hours will be crucial 48 hours later they said well he has stabilized but he's in a deep deep coma and frankly we don't know if he'll ever come out of it we can't keep him here at Memorial though because his life his bodily injuries are not threatening at this point so they moved him to a convalescent home in Huntersville North Carolina Bob worked in Charlotte at a architectural firm and every day he would pass close by Huntersville get off the interstate go to Huntersville see his son going to work his wife Shirley would go around noontime she would stay with him several hours she would read to him hold his hand and just talk to her son try to get him to wake up it's now been 18 months one Wednesday night at the prayer meeting I see them and I say could you come by the office for a minute we go by my office I sit down in a couch and they sit down and couch and chair beside me and I just said how's it going I hadn't had a chance to just talk with you privately for a while how's it going how you dealing with Mark's injury and I'll never forget that conversation over 40 years ago he just began to just cry uncontrollably he looks up and he says pastor it's the hardest thing we've ever gone through said mostly it's killing me how it's killing his mama he said and this is what we're praying we've begged God we've told God God if you would let Mark wake up if you'd let me just even if he doesn't stay alert if he could just wake up one more time he could look at his mother and tell her he loved her that he hurt her and and just give her some reason to hope we've told God God we will love you and praise you and serve you until the day we die and then he just dropped his face in his hands and he wept after about 45 seconds he looked back up wiped the tears away and this is what he said I'll never forget it and we've also told God God if he never wakes up if he never says another word if he dies tomorrow if he lives 10 years we promise we're gonna love you and serve you forever another 18 months passed and three years after that accident Mark Byrd went to be with the Lord Jesus Christ he never woke up he never spoke a word but his two parents honored that commitment and they've been faithful to their Lord ever since that day they never wavered in their faith they were just like Shadrach Meshach and Abednego Lord if you'll do this but if not if not now that's commitment are you committed to God like that are you committed to your spouse and your family like that are you committed to the body of believers here at First Baptist Pickens like that I'm gonna tell you this is a moment of truth for this church because for 25 years you've had unity and solidarity and you've been united by a great preacher and a great man but he's left us he's retired and this is a time where we'll see what you're made of this is a time for you to pull together more than you've ever needed to pull together in the last 25 years it's

a time for staff people to step it up it's a time for deacons and leadership to step it up it's a time for Sunday school teachers to step it up it's a time for everyone who names Christ as their Savior and is a member of this church to say you know what it's not time for me to loaf it's not time for me to take a walk in the park it's not time for me to be missing in action it's a time for me to be on deck all hands on deck it's a time for me to do my part it's not a time to observe it's a time to participate it's not a time to watch it's not a time to sit it's a time to be active I'm gonna tell you something God has gifted you and blessed you and you owe it to him and to this church to do your very best for him this morning we're gonna have a song play to him play and during that time I hope you'll prayerfully consider the commitment that God would have you make today mostly to him if you'll make the right commitment to him these other commitments will fall in place amen what would God have you do it may be that you look at your life and you say well I've gotten slack in my faith man COVID COVID has given us a mentality that it's okay for us to walk away from church to be away from church and I understand that there was a need for us at one time there may come a need in the future for us to say you know what we're gonna worship in a different fashion but if there was ever a time right now today that we need to be found faithful in God's house it's this day let's bow together in prayer father lead us and guide us today to not just put checks on a card but to really think about what role we can play and how you've gifted us and what we can do for your kingdom whether it's with a one or with Sunday school or music whether it's to serve behind the scenes in a helping role God let us be our best for you let us have a great faith Lord and believe that you're actively involved in our lives Lord I pray today that we would be as committed to you as Shadrach Meshach and Abednego for we make this prayer in Jesus name and for his sake amen you