

# “Made to Worship”

Allan Pole on Saturday evening, December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021



Theme: We are wired to worship *someone* or *something*.

Text: Daniel 3:1-30

Here's a thought: The question is not *if* we will worship but *who* or *what* we will worship.

Just as the first hymn started, a man wearing a brown hat was ushered into a front pew. One of the ushers suggested kindly that he take the hat off. “No,” the man replied, “I prefer to keep it on.”

There was some consternation at the back of the sanctuary. The head usher asked the man to take off his hat, but he, too, was rebuffed. The chairman of the board was enlisted to make an appeal, only to have the man under the hat reply, “I have every right to keep my hat on, and I intend to do so.” The chairman asked the president of the women's group to help. Alas she, too, failed. After the service, the minister approached the man and in a kindly way explained, “It has been a great pleasure to have you with us this morning. You will be welcome to join our congregation and worship here regularly. However, it is the custom in our church for men to remove their hats, and to keep them off during the service. I hope that you might conform to this practice in the future.”

The man under the hat replied, “Thank you very much. It is good of you to invite me to join the congregation. I have been coming regularly for three years, but today is the first time that anyone paid any attention to me. By simply keeping my hat on, I have had the pleasure of talking with the usher, the chairman, the president of the women's group, and now I am having a conversation with you, who have always appeared too busy to speak to me before. I feel good about it, and wish to express my appreciation.”

When we take off the hats and look at our hearts, why *do* we worship? Let's keep this question in mind as we read Daniel 3:1-30:

1 King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, ninety feet high and nine feet wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. 2 He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. 3 So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it. 4 Then the herald loudly proclaimed, “This is what you are commanded to do, O peoples, nations and men of every language: 5 As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that

King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. 6 Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.” 7 Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. 8 At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. 9 They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, “O king, live forever! 10 You have issued a decree, O king, that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, 11 and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. 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, O king. 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, pipes 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?” 16 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, “O 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 save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. 18 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.” 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. 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, O king.” 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.” 26 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, 27 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. 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. NIV

We can worship:

## **A Creation**



King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream in Daniel chapter 2 and God revealed to and through Daniel that the dream featured a statue with King Nebuchadnezzar as the golden head, the greatest of the world's empires that were to follow. Daniel and his three friends were promoted as a result of this dream's interpretation. You would think that such an experience would convert the king to worship and follow the God of the universe. Instead, he erected a statue of his own and demanded that everyone worship it.

King Nebuchadnezzar was not content to be the statue's head of gold as his dream illustrated in Daniel chapter 2. Motivated by pride, he wanted a whole statue of gold that would be worshipped when and where he wanted. Such an image would bring the allegiances of the people together. This project reveals the longing in the human heart to worship *someone* or *something*. We typically worship the god *we want* or the God *who is* (Romans 1:20-22).

You might not know this, but over a thousand years ago, there was a culture in Southeast Asia that worshipped parrots. They were polytheistic.

It is no coincidence that the first of the Ten Commandments God gave Moses to teach the Israelites addressed this very issue. The Lord could not have been blunter in Exodus 20:3-6:

3 You shall have no other gods before me. 4 You shall not make for yourself an idol 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 fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing love to a thousand [generations] of those who love me and keep my commandments. NIV

Can you picture an image of gold, ninety feet high and nine feet wide? With the average storey in a building at 14 feet, we are talking about the height of a six-floor structure. This was huge! There wouldn't be enough gold in the kingdom of Babylon for it to be solid gold so it was probably wooden and covered with gold.

They set this image on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. We don't know where this was for sure, but it must have been an imposing, intimidating figure on the flatland probably close to the city of Babylon. Unlike the Calgary Tower, the skyline prominence of the Eiffel Tower and other famous monuments in Paris remain unchallenged because city council set a height limit for new buildings within the city limits. It would appear that King

Nebuchadnezzar wanted his gold statue to stand out!

Some astrologers were looking for an opportunity to destroy the Jews and for political advancement, so they patronized the king and reported the Jews who refused to worship this statue. Why did these astrologers worship? They wanted to please people – and one person in particular. Motives are incredibly important, and this includes worship. We worship a creation – whether it is people or what is made by people – when we look for recognition from those around us. We worship a creation when what we do, say or sing in public does not match what we do, say or sing in private.

Furnaces were used for baking pottery or bricks during construction projects, as well as for metalwork. Many early furnaces were enclosed and domed with side doors for ventilation. Depending on what the furnace was being used for, the temperature would be maintained at between 900 and 1100 degrees Celsius. To raise the temperature “seven times hotter” was just an expression and with their technology, they could not exceed 1500 degrees Celsius. The furnace was probably in this location to serve a purpose (perhaps to make the image) rather than having been set up to use as an instrument of punishment. Burning alive was an ancient punishment among the Babylonians, and possibly among other nations. What a terrible way to die!

The Babylonians had many gods, but the king decided that one was to be worshipped particularly at that time. There are still many options for worship today, but popular opinion will call us to focus our attention on some person or some issue for a time.

Facebook, for example, is a lot like ancient Egypt. People write on walls, use emojis, and worship cats.

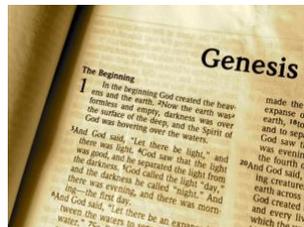
We might envision a gold statue when we read 1 John 5:20-21:

20 We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true - even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. 21 Dear children, keep yourselves from idols. NIV

Idols are still around today. They call for our attention and our affection. They will lure us away from the One who made us and will consume us if we let them.

*Who* or *what* has your attention and affection? The answer to this question is found as we reflect on what we think about, talk about, and where we focus our time, energy and money.

We can worship:  
A Creation  
or  
**The Creator**



Even the strong soldiers who bound the three young Jewish men and threw them into the fire could not handle the heat. Imagine the king's astonishment when he saw these three joined by a fourth man who he described as one that looked like a son of the gods. Was this an angel? Was this the pre-incarnate Christ? This could be. The astrologers advised the king in Daniel 2:11 that the gods do not live among men, but this was certainly a divine visitation and intervention. King Nebuchadnezzar had his chances to turn to the one true God. However, read on in the book of Daniel and you will see that he did not.

We might think that the point of Daniel chapter 3 is to show us that the Lord will rescue us from the fire. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were confident that the Lord was willing and able to rescue them, but they decided that whether He did or did *not* rescue them, they would worship only their maker. Stephen was not rescued from being stoned to death (Acts 7:59-60) for his allegiance to Jesus. The Bible and tradition tell us that 10 of the 12 original apostles were martyred because of their faith in Christ. The Foxe's Book of Martyrs and many other records reveal that followers of Jesus have given their lives and continue to give their lives because they refuse to worship *anyone* or *anything* other than their maker. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego demonstrated by their words and actions that the God of heaven is lord over gold, fire, kings, governments, politics and anything or anyone else that calls for our worship, allegiance, obedience, love and loyalty. They were willing to risk everything for the Lord and, in this case, they were rewarded on this side of eternity.

To worship God is to love God. What does it mean to love God? Nicholas Schaser explains (<https://lp.israelbiblecenter.com/lp-biblical-studies-content-love-in-hebrew-thought-en.html?via=c496cb1>):

Deuteronomy 6:5 states, "You shall love (אהבת; ahavta) the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your life and with all your strength." But what does it mean to "love" God according to ancient Israelite thought? For the biblical authors, love isn't just an intense form of "liking" or some kind of "warm feeling" for another; rather, the most common Hebrew word for "love" (אהבה; ahavah) expresses loyalty.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism was completed in 1647 and its truth endures: "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever." This is the reason God created Adam and Eve. He wanted us to be with Him and to do stuff with Him. When Adam and Eve ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden in Genesis chapter 3, they chose to worship what was made rather than the One who made them. This choice drove a wedge between the perfect fellowship and partnership they enjoyed with their creator. Thankfully, God had a plan to restore this broken relationship. When we receive Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, we accept this plan. When we worship God in response to His plan, we declare His sovereignty over all that we are and all that we have.

When the Roman Empire dominated the world about 600 years after King Nebuchadnezzar, Rome demanded that citizens show their allegiance by proclaiming, "Caesar is Lord." When someone announced "Jesus is Lord" they risked punishment. Followers of Jesus today might use this phrase, but let's not use it flippantly. Let's think about His lordship over every other option that calls for our attention and affection.

Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) concluded, "Nothing teaches us about the preciousness of the Creator as much as when we learn the emptiness of everything else."

The Bible teaches us to submit to governing authorities, but Daniel chapter 3 provides us with a Biblical precedent for civil disobedience. If the government or any authority requires us to worship *anything* or *anyone* other than the one true God, we are free under heaven to disobey the earthly authority.

Jesus calls us to worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). Such worship originates from free will, not coercion. The One who made us does not make us worship Him. He hardwired into us the freedom to choose. God is not worshipped when we try to make someone worship or when someone tries to make us worship. Worship starts on the inside and shows on the outside. We don't just think about worship, we express our worship. Worship is not humiliating but it is humbling. Worship is not manipulated but it is chosen. We decide when to worship and when *not* to worship.

Let's return to our original question, "Why do we worship? Because we are made to worship. We humans are worshipping creatures. As Chris Tomlin sang, "You and I were made to worship." The question is not *if* we will worship but *who* or *what* we will worship. We will worship the one true God or we will worship the god that we imagine with our minds or make with our hands.

Our Creator has *made* us to worship, but He does not *make* us worship Him. He *invites* us to worship Him. How will we respond to His invitation?

We can worship:

## **A Creation**

or  
**The Creator**

We are wired to worship *someone* or *something*.

