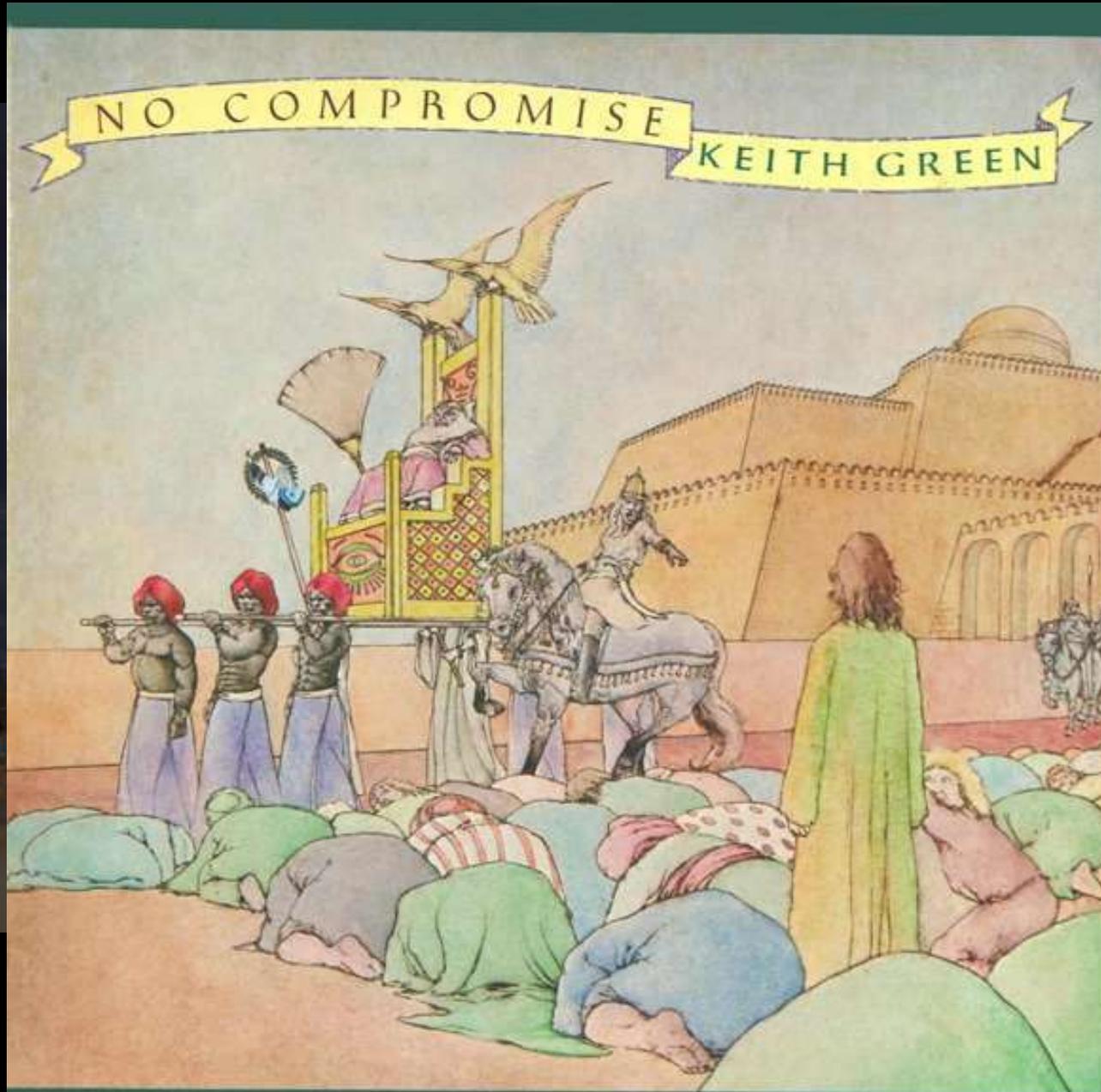
A historical photograph of Adolf Hitler in Italy, 1938, with a text overlay. The background shows Hitler in a dark suit, surrounded by a crowd of people, some in military uniforms and some in civilian attire. The scene is outdoors, possibly in a public square or a street. The text is overlaid in a white, serif font, reading: "An interesting story comes out of WWII - 'In mid-1938 Hitler paid a visit to Italy, hoping to cement an alliance. Mussolini entertained him royally, subjecting him to various displays of Italian military 'might.' But the crowds had a sort of sullen apathy toward the German leader. Hitler spent four hours in Florence but must have been dismayed when it became clear that the cheers rending the air were fictitious; they were crowd effects from some Italian movie and were played by a bunch of amplifiers from open windows. It was a sign that something was wrong, that there can be great power and real emptiness side by side.'"

Ok—how many of you remember this?



Let's take a look at a few passages of Scripture, and then ask a question ~

- Deut. 27:15; Isaiah 44:9-20; Psalm 115:4-8

Here's the question: Psalm 115:8 says that those who make and trust in idols become like those idols. What does that mean?

- Interesting that idols are worthless, lifeless...yet they have, and exert, a hidden influence, or power.
- D.A. Carson: "What you worship you soon resemble; more, you identify with it, defend it, make common cause with it—and if it is an abomination to God, soon you are an abomination to him."

The danger of idol worship ~

Tim Challies: "If we give our allegiance to something that is useless, empty, fleeting, then we become useless, empty, and fleeting. This is the psalmist's surprising claim, his grave warning: It's not just idols that are empty and powerless. It's also the people who worship them."

Tony Reinke: "Whenever we worship a created object or person or animal, we are acting unnaturally towards the Creator. And through this unnatural worship of a created thing, the life of the worshipper takes on increasingly unnatural characteristics as well — and that unnatural character is reflected in the unnatural sexual sins that Paul later describes" (in Romans 1).

The danger of idol worship ~

Greg Beale makes the point in his book, *We Become what we Worship*, that what you worship will lead either to your ruin (Rom. 1:23), or your restoration (Rom. 8:29).

Judging by his reaction, King Nebuchadnezzar didn't worship the idol he had made, he worshipped the idol he believed himself to be (3:13, 19).

One more passage: Psalm 97

- First, the Lord's reign over the world (v. 1-6).
- Second, *the Lord's reign over false gods* (v. 7-9)
- And third, the Lord's reign over His people (v. 10-12).

Picking up where we left off last week...

Nebuchadnezzar has an image of gold made—90 feet tall, 9 feet wide—and government officials from throughout his kingdom are “invited” to come and worship the image. They come, highly motivated by those three little words: Burning, fiery, and furnace.

- All who are present are commanded to fall down and worship the images as soon as the worship band starts playing.
- I'll guarantee you—when the band hit the first note of the song, there was a rush to see who could be the first to fall to the ground.
- But there was one little glitch in this plan...

Here's the title we're using for the book:

The King of the Nations

Our key verse for the book is 4:34b—"His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation."

The book divides naturally into two halves...

- Daniel in the King's courts ~ chs. 1-6
- Daniel and the King's visions ~ chs. 7-12

Daniel 3—How Nebuchadnezzar failed to learn the lesson of 2:37-38, 44-45

- The worship of the golden image ~ v. 1-7
- The false accusation against the Jews ~ v. 8-12
- The fury of the king against the Jews ~ v. 13-23
- The faithfulness of God to His people ~ v. 24-30

The false accusation against the Jews ~ 3:8-12

By the time we get to v. 8, the band is playing, and all of the people “fell down and worshiped the golden image...” Well, not quite *all* of the people...

The writer adds a little editorial comment in v. 8:

“...certain Chaldeans (astrologers) came forward and *maliciously accused the Jews.*”

- They remind the king of his command in v. 9-10, and especially of the motivation he gives in v. 11.

Why do you suppose these Chaldeans “maliciously accused” certain Jews “whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon...”?

- Maybe a little envious, do you suppose?

The false accusation against the Jews ~ 3:8-12

Well, they make a threefold accusation against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego:

- Contention #1: "These men, O king, pay no attention to you..." Not true. Contention #2: "...they do not serve your gods..." True. Contention #3: "...or worship the golden image that you have set up." True.

The three young men were willing to stand. Alone. When Martin Luther stood before the authorities of the Catholic Church and was called upon to recant his commitment to justification by faith alone, he said this:

The false accusation against the Jews ~ 3:8-12

“Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason...my conscience is captive to the Word of God, I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen.”

Now we come to act 2 in this drama: The fury of the king ~ 3:13-23

Nebuchadnezzar's response when he heard about these three who refused to bow: “furious rage” (v. 13), followed by the very real threat of the burning fiery furnace. And a question: “And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?”

The fury of the king ~ 3:13-23

How come it really is kind of a waste of time to wonder how we would react if we were threatened with being tossed into a burning fiery furnace?

Answer: Because it is probably safe to assume that none of us will *ever* face that, and God has not promised to give us grace for those things. What has He promised to give us grace for?

Answer: The things we will actually go through. For example, Ps. 23:4, 138:7; 1 Cor. 10:13. How much manna could the Israelites store for the next day?

Answer: None. God supplied what was needed for each day. He gives daily bread—in many ways.

The fury of the king ~ 3:13-23

None of us will have to face pressure to conform with the threat of a looming burning fiery furnace...but do we face pressure to conform? In what ways?

“There is no gun pointed at our head, but in our case none is needed, for we are often easily cajoled into putting the Lord second to our idol. In fact, our hearts are all the more condemned by the very smallness of the pressure under which we buckle and bow down. Not for us the grand declaration that, come what may, we will never bow down to the idols of our hearts...instead, we often slip unthinkingly into a daily obeisance to our idol’s demands, like the rest of the crowd on the plain of Babylon.” ~ Iain Duguid

The fury of the king ~ 3:13-23

So these three men, who refused to bow down to the image, make an interesting declaration to the king in v. 16-18.

- In v. 17 they are filled with faith: “our God...is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king.”
- But what about v. 18? Is that doubt? Unbelief? What are they saying in v. 18?

Sometimes God miraculously delivers His people. And sometimes He does not, and withholds His power, and allows even great suffering. What are we to think about that?

The fury of the king ~ 3:13-23

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego knew this:

“He will deliver us out of your hand...” one way or another. They didn’t know how, just that He would.

- For them, allegiance to God came first, whether or not they ended up in the furnace.
- If they were to die in the fiery furnace, then that would be God’s chosen method of delivering them out of the hand of the king.
- Dale Davis puts it this way: “This part of their answer (v. 17) deals with the ability of God; they are not so certain about His pleasure (v. 18).” They know His ability, but not His purpose.

The fury of the king ~ 3:13-23

Davis goes on to say this: “So they were unsure of God’s circumstantial will (whether they escape) but were sure of God’s revealed will (‘You shall have no other gods besides Me’).”

What was most important to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: deliverance...or obedience?

- They knew the power of God ~ “He is able...”
- They acknowledged the freedom of God to do His pleasure (Ps. 115:3) ~ “But if not...”
- They obeyed the command of God ~ “we will not serve your gods...”

The fury of the king – 3:13-23

Walter Luthi: “That there are three men who do not worship in Nebuchadnezzar’s totalitarian state, is a miracle of God. The miracle of the confessing Church. That the three were not devoured by the fire is no greater miracle. Suppose the fiery furnace *had* consumed them. The real miracle would have happened just the same.”

So the king orders the furnace heated as hot as it can be (v. 19). And his ridiculous, unnecessary, and rage-fueled command results in the death of some of his own soldiers. There ought to be some kind of a lesson in there somewhere.

The fury of the king – 3:13-23

The heat in the furnace is rising rapidly (it strikes me here that my wife and daughter would be pulling chairs up close to the furnace at this point), and king Nebuchadnezzar is about to get the answer to his question in v. 15 – “And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?”

Will God deliver? “Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments...” Surely anytime now, right? Right?

Will God deliver? “...and they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace.” Wait...what?

Will God deliver? “And these three men...fell bound into the burning fiery furnace.” It doesn't look good.



The fury of the king – 3:13-23

And so now it looks like the worst possible thing has happened—these men of God, men who trusted God, young and full of life and talent and gifts and promise, given high government positions in wicked Babylon, able to advocate for the Jews and watch over their welfare—these men have been thrown into a super-heated furnace. No miracle deliverance.

Yet.

The eminent Dr. Calvin lands the plane today: “Here, at first sight, God seems to desert His servants, since He does not openly succour them. The king orders them to be thrown into a furnace of

The fury of the king ~ 3:13-23

fire: no help from heaven appears for them. This was a living and remarkably efficacious proof of their faithfulness. But they were prepared...to endure everything. These bold answers were not prompted simply by their trust in God's immediate help, but by a determination to die; since a better life occupied their thoughts, they willingly sacrificed the present life. Hence they were not frightened at this terrible order of the king's, but followed on their course, fearlessly submitting to death for the worship of God. No third way was opened for them, when a choice was granted either to submit to death, or to

The fury of the king ~ 3:13-23

apostatize from the true God. By this example we are taught to meditate on our immortal life in times of ease, so that if God pleases, we may not hesitate to expose our souls by the confession of the true faith... When we are allowed to be at ease, we ought to apply our minds to meditation upon a future life, so that this world may become cheap to us, and we may be prepared when necessary to pour forth our blood in testimony to the truth." ~ John Calvin

