

Almighty and Everlasting God, You inspire us to confess Your holy name by the witness of Your saints of all ages: Grant that Your Church, encouraged by their example, may in like manner for love of You despise the prosperity of this world, and fear none of its adversities, and that we may be ready to suffer fearlessly for Your name's sake, so that by Your grace we may be numbered among them in glory everlasting; through Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage 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, 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 are 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. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?" Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. 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." Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated. And he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace. Because the king's order was urgent and the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace. Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king." He answered and said, "But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods." Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace; he declared, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here!" Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them. Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent His angel and delivered His servants, who trusted in Him, and set aside the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God.

In Christ Jesus, whom God has sent to deliver His servants of all time and places in this our great tribulation, dear fellow redeemed:

Our Epistle lesson describes how the Apostle John had as part of Jesus' revelation to him of heaven the vision of the countless number of white robed worshippers before the throne and the Lamb. He was informed shortly after this section that "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." God's saints, including you.

What is the great tribulation? It is life in this unbelieving dying world for us who trust in Jesus and His promise of everlasting life in heaven. For now we suffer and mourn at every turn. But instead of our sin and deserved death having dominion over us, claiming us for all eternity, we are delivered by the blood of the Lamb.

This is the situation for all believers in Christ, always has been and always will be until the end of this world. How we are to bear up under it is demonstrated by those three believers in our text. So let us take note today how it is that **The Lord's Saints Safely Yield Their Lives in the Great Tribulation.**

I

We honor and remember four of our beloved baptized saints today who came through tribulation of about 70 to almost 90 years, and one child of God unable to be baptized and really only known by her immediate family besides the Lord of course, dying before birth. Les, Pat, LaRea, Vicky and Talitha all came through this great tribulation yielding their lives to various attacks against them in this fallen world, through pain and suffering, grief and sorrow, knowingly and unknowingly. All came to their deserved end as sinners, death. But as you know, all of them were blessed in dying in the Lord of all mercy. From then on they entered their heavenly rest and eternal joy for Jesus' sake. Their bodily remains await the great day of resurrection. Blessed be their memories all, for Jesus' sake.

In our text we have four holy ones standing in the flames of their great tribulation. The three, were Shadrack, Meshak and Abendego, believers in the promised Christ. The fourth was not known to the King, nor to the mighty men of his army who threw the other three into the blazing fiery furnace. God reveals who it was by calling him The Angel of the Lord. This is a designation we have seen before in the Old Testament – this is the pre-incarnate Son of God, the Anointed One, the Christ, the Savior of all mankind.

What was the nature of this great tribulation for these three believers of Judah? The Gentile king demanded that he be worshipped through the golden image that he had made or be thrown into the fire. But they could not – would not and told him so directly and then said: “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.”

Did you catch that? They did not claim that God would definitely deliver them from the fiery furnace, but only that He could. Their trust was in God’s promised goodness, which is fulfilled here in time or in heaven for all eternity. Either way He always delivers His people from evil.

II

As we live in this great tribulation and bear witness to the love of our Lord Jesus for all people, we are made to bear up under our crosses in this life and follow our Lord wherever He leads us. There have been relatively few believers down through the millennia who actually yielded their lives unto death because they confessed the Lord Jesus up to their last breath. Those who have we call “*martyrs*”, or witnesses who were willing and were required to yield up their lives in this world in the name of the Lord Jesus. There are Christians throughout the world even today who face such martyrdom at the hands of hate-filled Muslims and Communists, who hate the Gospel.

Shadrack, Meshack and Abendego certainly came close to being such martyrs for their faith in Christ alone, but our Lord spared their lives. He protected them even to the point where it was observed: “the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them.” We know it was a real fire, because of the intensity of the blaze, the men who “ushered” them into the furnace were overcome by the heat and died in its proximity, but again no harm came to these believers who were thrown in the fire bound confident of God’s everlasting love for them in Christ.

The five Parkland saints we honor today did not die the death of martyrs in this sense, but they still came through this great tribulation. Some even had signs on their bodies they had come through this life not unscathed. All of them regardless what they had to endure in this life died peaceful deaths, safe in the arms of Jesus.

How are you doing my fellow saints in Christ during these times of your tribulations? Do you live under the grace of our Lord

enabling you to say something similar: *my God whom I have been called to serve is able to deliver me from any tribulation. But if not, be it known that I will not serve other gods or worship anything else. I am ready and willing to yield up my life in however great the tribulation may be.*

As much as we think now that we will not be facing such choices they are out there and they are becoming increasingly intense in the U.S. Christians today in the work place or in institutions of higher learning are being required to deny that *"all lives matter"* because it has been branded politically incorrect. Do not misunderstand, the Christ's Church condemns all forms of racism, but Christ came to save all lives of all races from the womb to the tomb, but if you verbalize that all-inclusive truth you may lose your job, your membership in a club, your enrolment in a school. To be driven to silence in regard to this central Christian truth, are you then bowing in worship at the altar of the spirit of our times and compromising the Gospel truth?

None of us can claim that we have never compromised our faith in the one true God to yield to the pressure of the world and to save our reputations in it. But Jesus remained perfect, never compromising any of the truths coming from His Father. He steadfastly confessed the truth all the way to the cross. But that is your comfort in your many failures. His perfect life was sacrificed for all such sins you have committed. His perfect life of never yielding in the face of wicked opposition is credited to you through faith in Him.

"Nebuchadnezzar ... said, 'Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent His angel and delivered His servants, who trusted in Him, and set aside the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God.'" Amazingly the unbelieving world often does take notice of Christ Jesus at work in our lives even today. As Jesus encouraged us shortly after our Gospel lesson speaking of how blessed we are by Him in this our great tribulation: "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, Abendnego, Les, Talitha, Patricia, Vicky and LaRea, who sent His Christ to deliver them from this great tribulation. He also as their Savior stood in the fiery furnace of the Father's eternal wrath for all their sin, original and actual, so that they do not cry out the cry of the damned as did their Lord for them, but have joined in the chorus of the song of salvation. Christ Jesus is not ashamed to call them His brothers and sisters before the throne of God. Blessed be their memories all for

Jesus' sake. Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.
Blessed indeed! Amen.