

# What Am I Prepared to Die For?

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Let's begin with Christ's own words, in Luke 14. This is a chapter we often go to in baptismal counseling and you'll see why in just a minute. We'll begin in verse 25 and I'm going to read this out of the New Living Translation [an older, online version]. It gives the sense of this section of scripture and flows a little easier.

**Luke 14:25** *Great crowds were following Jesus. [He was creating quite a stir.] He turned around and said to them,*

26) *"If you want to be my follower [if you want to follow in my footsteps, here's what you have to do], you must love me more than your own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, more than your own life [a very clear scripture]. If you don't, you cannot be my disciple.*

27) *And if you do not carry your own cross and follow me, [we know Christ carried that burden all the way to His death, and there is a burden to bear to follow God and to follow Christ's example] you cannot be my disciple.*

28) *"But don't begin until you count the cost. [This is what we cover with somebody anticipating or looking forward to or wanting to be baptized—and He explains] For who would begin construction of a building without first getting estimates and then checking to see if there is enough money to pay the bills?*

29) *Otherwise, you might complete only the foundation before running out of funds, and then how everyone would laugh at you.*

30) *They would say, 'There's the person who started that building and ran out of money before it was finished!'"*

31) *"Or what king would go to war without first sitting down with his counselors and discussing whether his army of 10,000 is strong enough to defeat the 20,000 soldiers who are marching against him?"*

32) *And if he is not able, then while the enemy is still far away, he will send a delegation to them seeking terms of peace. (NLT)*

And in verse 33, the point is:

33) *No one can become My disciple without giving up everything for Me. (NLT)*

That word *everything*, as we've just read (and there are many other scriptures that support this)—everything includes the willingness to give up our own life. If we have to die to follow what we believe, then so be it.

Back in 1994, '93, '95—back when there was turmoil in the Worldwide Church of God—doctrines were being changed rather quickly. Protestant teachings were being introduced in the church, including the trinity—great effort was spent trying to explain the unexplainable and there was much being changed. That resulted in much confusion

in the ministry and among the brethren because this was all new territory. There was much confusion about what was really important here because everything was changing—so much was changing—so the question became, what's important? Something happened under these stressful conditions that was very helpful to me because it helped me frame that issue, that situation, in a way that made sense and then I could chart my path. At that time, a friend in the ministry said something that I've never forgotten. When people were asking what's important and what's not important, he said, I think the issue boils down to the question, what doctrines are we willing to die for? That's what tells what's important or what's not important. That really hit home and I've never forgotten that. So that leads to the title of the sermon today:

### What Am I Prepared to Die For?

We just read that Christ said, you can't be My disciple unless you are willing to give up everything, including your own life. So maybe it would be good if we meditated upon or at least thought about this—what am I prepared to die for?

Let's go back in history to look at a prime example of that subject in the Old Testament. We're going to talk about the Babylonian Empire. Today, if you look at a map of the modern Middle East, the Babylonian Empire comprised and covered what is now Israel and Jordan on the far west, and to the north Syria and parts of Turkey; to the east it covered Iran and Iraq, and to the South it dominated Egypt—a massive territory. Nebuchadnezzar the Second ruled Babylon from 605 to 562 B.C. He ruled longer and was more powerful than any Babylonian king.

Today we have a hard time understanding how a king operates because we live in a democracy and most of the people in the church live in a democracy. We have a hard time understanding that a king in ancient times had total power over the empire, the nation—he had total power over the entire society and he had total power, including the power of life and death over every subject that was under him—every person. We have a hard time understanding that. A modern example, as sad and horrible as it is, would be Saddam Hussein, who is thankfully under the earth right now.

When Saddam Hussein gained control of Iraq, he became a dictator, and early on, in order to establish his power, he had a meeting of all the military heads and the governmental heads in a warehouse—this is true story. In that warehouse was an industrial wood chipper and there was a man (I don't recall his exact position) and this man didn't support Saddam Hussein as much as Saddam Hussein thought he should, so in front of everybody, he put him live into that wood chipper and then after that event, it changed a lot of people's minds about their loyalty, and all of a sudden people were bowing down to him and kissing his hands and praising his name.

One of his sons (again, his time on earth is over now, thankfully), after Saddam Hussein gained power, was in a high-end hotel in Bagdad with a bunch of his cronies, where a wedding was taking place. When the wedding was over and the young bride and her husband were walking out to leave for their honeymoon, the son saw the bride and took

a liking to her, so he sent his henchman to take her away from her new husband, and they brought her to his penthouse on the top floor of the hotel, where he raped her, and then, if that wasn't enough, he threw her off the balcony and she fell to her death. This was right after her marriage. Not a thing was done—no retribution, no justice served, because when somebody has total power, this is what can happen, even in modern times. What we're going to see is that, in like manner, in the time of the Babylonian empire, Nebuchadnezzar was a ruler nobody wanted to trifle with. Let's turn over to 2 Chronicles 36:11 to establish the context of what we're going to examine here. This passage is referring to the last king of Judah. Judah was about to be conquered by Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian Empire.

**2 Chronicles 36:11** *Zedekiah was one and twenty years old when he began to reign, and reigned eleven years in Jerusalem.*

*12) And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD his God, and humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of the LORD. (KJV)*

Didn't pay attention at all—in fact he went the opposite way. Verse 13.

*13) And he also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar [bad idea], who had made him swear by God: but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the LORD God of Israel. (KJV)*

He just wouldn't do it. He rejected God. Verse 14.

*14) Moreover all the chief of the priests [the top echelon of the priesthood], and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the LORD which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. (KJV)*

Ezekiel prophesied much about this. We see here that Zedekiah willingly rejected God, turned his back on God. That is obviously something we cannot do—can never do. Verse 15.

*15) And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, [referring to the prophets, of course] rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, [God sent prophet after prophet after prophet—He had compassion on His people] and [he had compassion] on his dwelling place [where God resided]:*

*16) But they mocked the messengers of God [this is something that just makes you sick in your stomach], and despised his words [they despised God's words], and misused his prophets [as was talked about in the sermonette], until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy. (KJV)*

God had done everything possible to get Judah to repent and they would not, and finally God just had enough—there's no use going any further; God said enough is enough. Verse 17.

17) *Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees [Nebuchadnezzar], who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion [this is part of Nebuchadnezzar's character] upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age [no compassion at all]: he [referring to God] gave them all into his [Nebuchadnezzar's] hand.*

18) *And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king, and of his princes; all these he brought to Babylon. (KJV)*

So unnecessary.

19) *And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof. (KJV)*

That occurred in 585 B.C., and by that time, as Ezekiel prophesied in chapter 10:18-19, God had already left the Holy of Holies—His presence was no longer there. He did so because of Judah's repeated disrespect toward Him and the repeated breaking of His law, and their total lack of repentance despite warning after warning after warning.

Let's continue the account in 2 Kings 25:1. What we're doing is setting the stage for what is going to come in the lives of three young men who were companions of Daniel. We want to set the stage here.

**2 Kings 25:1** *And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he, and all his host, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it; and they built forts against it round about.*

2) *And the city was besieged unto the eleventh year of king Zedekiah.*

3) *And on the ninth day of the fourth month the famine prevailed in the city, and there was no bread for the people of the land. [That was prophesied also.]*

4) *And the city was broken up, and all the men of war fled by night by the way of the gate between two walls, which is by the king's garden: (now the Chaldees were against the city round about:) [they had it surrounded] and the king went the way toward the plain. (KJV)*

The king and some of his men made a dash—they tried to escape.

5) *And the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho: and all his army were scattered from him. (KJV)*

So he was all alone now—didn't listen to God.

6) *So they took the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon to Riblah; and they gave judgment upon him. (KJV)*

What was that judgment?

*7) And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon. (KJV)*

King Nebuchadnezzar determined that the last thing he wanted Zedekiah to see was the death, the slaughter of his children, his sons, right before him, then they put out his eyes and that was the last thing that he saw. That tells you something about the character and the attitude of Nebuchadnezzar. Again, a man you wouldn't want to trifle with.

Now let's get to the point—Daniel 3:1. Here we see that Jews were carried away to Babylon, and some of the Jews were given favor in the court of Nebuchadnezzar.

**Daniel 3:1** *Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits [depending on the cubit used that is ninety to ninety-five-foot tall; this wasn't a small image], and the breadth thereof six cubits [that's about ten feet]: he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. (KJV)*

People have speculated and speculated as to what this image was. The ten-to-one ratio of height to width could mean it was a circular tower (ninety-five-foot tall and ten feet in diameter) or it could have been an obelisk with carvings and pictures on the tower or on the obelisk. Of the ten-to-one ratio, if that was the height and the thickness of a man, that is about a ten-to-one ratio. So if it wasn't the breath of a man but the thickness of a man, then that image could have been of a man or a picture of a god who kind of looked like a man. Or, the total height—the ninety, ninety-five-foot-height part of it—could have been a pedestal with an image on top of that. We just don't know. The Bible is fuzzy in that regard.

*2) Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. (KJV)*

We see here that all the leaders of importance came to this location at one time. It would be like getting all of Congress, all the cabinet heads, the Supreme Court, all the generals, all the captains of industry, all the leaders of the colleges and universities, all the mayors of all the big cities, the governors of every state, in one place. This is exactly what happened relative to Babylon. Back then, if Nebuchadnezzar gave you an invitation, you came; there was no question. You couldn't back out because of sickness or inconvenience—that just didn't happen.

*4) Then [after everyone is gathered] a herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages,*

5) *That at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, [I'm reading out of the King James] sackbut [that's a lyre], psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up: (KJV)*

It may have been an image of him for all we know.

6) *And whoso falleth not down and worshipping shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. (KJV)*

This was no idle threat. We see threats from politicians all the time and nobody ever follows through but Nebuchadnezzar wasn't that kind of man. Keep your finger here and go to Jeremiah 29:22. When Nebuchadnezzar made a decree or a threat, his subjects could count on it coming to pass.

**Jeremiah 29:22** *And of them shall be taken up a curse by all the captivity of Judah which are in Babylon, saying [notice the last part of the verse, this is germane to what we are talking about], The LORD make thee like Zedekiah and like Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire; (KJV)*

Nebuchadnezzar was a very bad man. He was not to be trifled with. Now let's go back to Daniel 3:8. The decree is made and people are supposed to bow down to this image.

**Daniel 3:8** *Wherefore at that time certain Chaldeans came near, and accused the Jews. (KJV)*

Why did they do that? It could have been because of jealousy. Just turn back a page to chapter 2 and you will recall that Nebuchadnezzar had a very troubling dream; it was terrifying to him and then he woke up but couldn't remember the specifics of the dream, but he remembered the terror so he called all of his wise men together.

**Daniel 2:2** *Then the king commanded to call the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans ... (KJV)*

If you look into their history, the Chaldeans were noted astrologers. So he called this group together, the "wise men" of the land.

2 continued) *... for to shew the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king. (KJV)*

And he said, I don't remember the dream but you are the wisemen, so you tell me the dream that I had, that I can't remember, and then you tell me the meaning of it. Of course there was a lot of foot shuffling and hemming and hawing and pointing fingers, but the bottom line is, they could not do that. They didn't know the dream. This sent Nebuchadnezzar into an absolute rage. What he decreed—remember, he has all power—was that all the wisemen in the land should be killed because they couldn't describe

the dream. This included Daniel, it included the three companions whom we're going to talk about: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. When that decree went out, Daniel took the matter to God when he heard it. He took the matter to God and God revealed to Daniel what the dream was and what its explanation was. Daniel appeared before Nebuchadnezzar, told him what the dream was, told him what the explanation was. The Chaldeans, these noted astrologers, were made to look bad and Daniel was elevated and promoted, and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego probably right with him. The point is there was great jealousy. In any kind of human organization that has a power structure, there are politics and jealousy going on, and the Chaldeans did not want Daniel to stand. They didn't want anybody who was loyal to Daniel or who worked for Daniel to stand. So they most likely became jealous and then they went to Nebuchadnezzar. Back to Daniel 3:8.

8) *...certain Chaldeans came near, and accused the Jews.*

9) *They spake and said to the king Nebuchadnezzar, O king, live for ever. (KJV)*

Oh yes, we love you, we'll follow you—and then, in the back of their mind—because, if we don't, we're going to be roasted in the fire, like everybody else.

10) *Thou, O king, hast made a decree, that every man that shall hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image:*

11) *And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth, that he should be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. (KJV)*

Verse 12; here is their attack on the Jews:

12) *There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. (KJV)*

We don't know much about these three young men; they were Jews who served the king at his pleasure. They could also have served under Daniel—probably so. Then the question comes up, why wasn't Daniel accused? He might have been up too high for them to accuse him or he could have been out of the country, doing the king's bidding, or he could have been sick or something like that; we just don't have a clue but these three were accused.

13) *Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Then they brought these men before the king. (KJV)*

Remember, all of the leaders are assembled in one place and Nebuchadnezzar, in some ways a loose cannon of a king when he got angry, is now in a rage against three of God's chosen; the three now appear before Nebuchadnezzar with all the leaders all

around. Do you think there might have been a little pressure here on these three young men? I think so.

14) *Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up?*

15) *Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well [good, fine]: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands? (KJV)*

What he is saying is, there is no god that can help you because I am over everything, including all the gods. That was a bad position for Nebuchadnezzar to put himself in. The point is, there was a clear choice for these three young men—a very clear choice. You break the first two commandments and you get to live. You obey the first two commandments, and you die—that’s the choice. At that point, there was no signal, nothing from God, no message, saying, I’ll get you out of this, don’t worry. No, they’re standing before Nebuchadnezzar and the whole leadership of the entire empire, and Nebuchadnezzar has veins popping out of his neck, and his face is red, and he’s screaming and yelling, and they’re standing in front of him. The obvious question they faced: Is this something I’m willing to die for? Or, as Terry said at the Feast so well, what’s the difference—we can bow down, we cannot bow down—what’s the big deal? They had a choice to make and these three young men were ready to die rather than commit idolatry. Let’s go to verse 16; I’m going to read this out of the NIV. This is astounding.

16) *Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, “Oh Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter.” (NIV)*

Can you imagine saying that to Nebuchadnezzar, with his power, his might, and all the leaders of the country around him?—in front of the whole empire, so to speak. What they’re really saying is, Nebuchadnezzar, we serve a higher power than you and we are not going to disobey this power that is higher than you. Verse 17.

17) *If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us and he will rescue us from your hand, Oh King. (NIV)*

That’s a possibility, they knew.

18) *But even if he does not, we want you to know, Oh King, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.” (NIV)*

Because we answer to a higher power, somebody superior to you. As we know, they were thrown into the furnace and there was a Being with them who protected them so that not one hair of their head was singed, not one thread of their clothing was burned;



let's pick up the story after they have come out, and now Nebuchadnezzar is astonished. A miracle has occurred; a power that he does not have was demonstrated. Verse 28.

*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 ... (NIV)*

Now that's something for a man like Nebuchadnezzar to admit—they've defied me and they've lived. So the only conclusion is that the God they serve is more powerful than Nebuchadnezzar and he had to admit it at this point.

*28 continued) ... and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. (NIV)*

What an example for us today when you think about it—where they were, how old they were, in a nation that had values we can't relate to, living as we do today in a democracy. So that's an example of answering the question, what am I willing to die for.

Let's go to a New Testament example of the same thing, in Acts 5; the first part of Acts 5 covers the death of Ananias and Sapphira—a miracle occurred there in front of Peter and the apostles, and God took their lives. We'll begin in verse 12.

**Acts 5:12** *And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people ...*

Verse 14.

*14) And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.) (KJV)*

This was becoming a threat to the religious hierarchy. All of these people were deserting the temple and they were flocking to the apostles, and undoubtedly churches were being set up or were meeting in people's homes and all of that—and that was a real threat.

*15) Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them [and be healed].*

*16) There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem ... (KJV)*

This wasn't just confined to Jerusalem; word of mouth spread really fast.

*16 continued) ... bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one. (KJV)*

Now notice this:

17) *Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with [praise for God? No, they were filled with] indignation ... (KJV)*

They were thinking, we can't have this, we're losing control, we're losing power. We're not in authority anymore. Verse 18.

18) *And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.*  
19) *But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said ... (KJV)*

Notice the instruction:

20) *Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.*  
(KJV)

If that happened today, the angel would say, go teach the record of scripture—go teach it. (What a concept—to teach the record of scripture.) It brought the apostles nothing but trouble.

21) *And when they heard that, they entered into the temple [they did exactly what the angel had told them] early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.*  
(KJV)

They didn't know that by a miracle the apostles had been released from the prison.

22) *But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told,*  
23) *Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety [no evidence of a prison break], and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within. (KJV)*

Verse 24; I'll read this out of the New King James.

24) *Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the outcome would be. (NKJV)*

They're thinking, what's going on here? We're losing the people.

25) *So one came and told them, saying, "Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!" (NKJV)*

That was a shock.

26) *Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned [the captain and his men].*  
27) *And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them,*  
28) *saying, "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!" (NKJV)*

Now let's stop here. In their minds, it's all about the religious hierarchy. No concern for the truth, no concern for what really happened—it's about us and our position and our authority and our money and the temple and all of this. Just amazing—miracles are going on all around them, and they refuse to take it in and understand it, and ask, why, what's God doing here? No. Verse 29.

29) *But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men [rather than you, is what they are saying].*  
30) *The God of our fathers [and Acts 3 tells us who the God of our Fathers is; it's God the Father] raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree.*  
(NKJV)

Jesus was killed because He was a threat to their power and their authority, and they wanted Him out of the way—no concern for truth, no concern for what God might be doing—it was all about them and their hierarchy. Verse 31.

31) *Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.*  
32) *And we are His witnesses to these things [we've seen it with our own eyes], and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him."*  
33) *When they heard this, they were furious and then they plotted to kill them.*  
(NKJV)

Instead of praising God for the miracles He was doing, they plotted the murder of the men who got in their way, in order to protect their own turf. These "religious" men prepared to kill in order to keep power. And that falls exactly in line with the sermon Jack Elder gave on power and authority on December 22 of last year. Here's the point: The apostles were prepared to die for what they saw and what they believed. Verse 34, back to the King James.

34) *Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel [this is the same Gamaliel, a very wise man, at whose feet Paul had been trained], a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space; (KJV)*

35) *And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men.*

36) *For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought.*

37) *After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.*

38) *And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought:*

39) *But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God. (KJV)*

The thought never occurred to them that they might be fighting against God because their minds were not on God but on themselves. And that is precisely what is happening today. We must be careful not to be at cross purposes with God. If God is doing something and we see it clearly in the Bible, with our own eyes, we had better be very careful about going against something that God is doing. The last place I want to be is at cross purposes with God Almighty.

40) *And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles ... (KJV)*

Guess what they did, they beat them. If you look at the Greek, it can also mean flay them. This was not just swat on the backside with a paddle; they beat them severely.

40 continued) *... and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. (KJV)*

Even in the churches of God today, ministers are being commanded not to speak freely about God and Christ, and it's amazing. As Solomon said, there's nothing new under the sun. It just happens over and over and over again.

41) *And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. (KJV)*

Guess what they did next. Did they go hide somewhere?

42) *And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ [the Son of God whom God the Father resurrected to pay the penalty for the sins of mankind]. (KJV)*

We see here a clear example in the Old Testament and a clear example in the New Testament of our brethren being willing to die for what they believe, willing to die in order to obey God. These are very clear examples. Today if somebody told us to deny God or Christ, I think most of us—hopefully most of us—would be willing to say, okay, this is the end of my life but I'm not going to disobey God. I'm not going to deny God or

Jesus Christ. The same is true for the Sabbath and the holy days. If somebody commanded us to keep Easter or Sunday or something like that, on pain of death, hopefully we would have the character, looking back at these examples, to say, this physical life isn't the supreme goal—we look for something better, and I'm willing to die now, rather than down the road, for something better.

Once we commit ourselves to totally obey God—we did that at baptism and we obviously commit ourselves over and over and over, to obey God—once we commit ourselves to that, we must willingly accept whatever consequences come our way. We don't know what they are going to be but we say before God, God, I am committed 100 percent to obey you, and I'm going to obey you no matter what. The martyrs down through the centuries died horrible, horrible deaths rather than deny God, deny Christ, or deny their beliefs. These three young men in Daniel's time or the apostles in the early New Testament Church are classic examples of what we should be willing to die for. Three young men threatened with death for not bowing down, the apostles being told, you can't talk about God, you can't preach about Jesus Christ, you can't preach about a resurrection—you can't do that. The point is, they put God first, they worshipped only God and they did His will, and those are our marching orders.

Let's change a bit of pace because some people ask, what about areas of lesser magnitude? Should I be willing to die about this or that? Let me give three examples. A couple of them are kind of humorous in hindsight; they weren't at the time but they are now. Let's take the precise makeup of the 144,000. I personally know a lady who will not attend with another group, will not associate with another group, will not talk to another group unless they believe exactly as she does about the exact makeup of the 144,000. The question is, the doctrine of who makes up the 144,000—am I willing to die for that? Just a thought—I'm asking a question.

Let me ask a second question. What about recognizing the Stone of Scone? I don't know if you remember what the Stone of Scone is, but back in the '60s and '70s it was talked about in the booklets and correspondence course of the Worldwide Church of God and was part of a prophetic scenario. As Worldwide went into apostasy in 1994, my wife and I were disfellowshipped because I said some things in sermons that those in power were not very happy about; we were disfellowshipped and our church in Yakima, Washington, was disbanded, so there were only two other groups that were extant at that time—two lifeboats in the water, so to speak. One was run by an unbalanced eccentric and the other was one that we attended because there was no alternate to the other one. We went and I attended ministerial conferences, and it was a newly formed group—they had been together, I think, a year or two. At one of the ministerial conferences a prominent minister from England insisted (he was making a proposal, a very heated one) that to be a member of this particular group (and if I mentioned the group, everybody would know it but I'm not going to do that) you had to recognize the Stone of Scone. For those who do not remember the Stone of Scone, it's a sandstone block about two feet by a foot and a half, and by a foot deep, made of sandstone. Legend has it that this block was the pillow upon which Jacob rested his head when in Bethel, in Genesis 28—Mark Mickelson talked about Jacob's time in

Bethel a few weeks ago. The legend concerning this stone was that ancient kings of Ireland and Scotland and England were always crowned sitting on a throne with this same stone underneath it. This minister was saying to everybody present that to be a member in good standing in this group one had to recognize the Stone of Scone. Is that something we are willing to die for? Just a question.

The third one is really ridiculous. How about eating white sugar? In the '60s I was told on more than one occasion that eating white sugar required the sacrifice and blood of Jesus Christ. It was a sin one had to repent of before God, and Christ's blood had to wash away that sin of taking a teaspoon of white sugar. I'm not saying that was a carved-in-stone doctrine of the church at the time but there were people who firmly believed that. Again, I ask the question, should we be willing to die for this?

These three examples I mentioned are kind of extreme and they are on the other side of what Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego went through and what the apostles went through, so the question becomes, what am I willing to die for? We have some very heated arguments about certain teachings. I've been in situations where I've observed heated arguments about things that were purely speculative; there was no proof one way or another, they were speculation and they couldn't be definitively proved, yet people got in heated arguments over them. And then other people in the church got their tail in a knot about ideas that in the grand scheme of things, didn't mean a hoot in the whirlwind, as my dad used to say (meaning, a tornado is coming at you with a roar, and you make a hoot that you can't even hear). Some of these "doctrines", in God's scheme of things, don't amount to a hoot in a whirlwind.

George Santayana (1863-1952), the philosopher and author, said this: *Fanaticism is redoubling your efforts when you have forgotten your aim.*

Sometimes a person takes up a cause, and it's like Wile E. Coyote, the character from the cartoon, who runs blindly off the cliff, determined to beat all, and then he looks down and suddenly realizes—oops, there's nothing under my feet—and he goes down. We've all been there, gotten ourselves into an argument, and we look back, and say, how did I get here? I'm in hot water! God gives us warnings to consider. Let's go to Proverbs 4:26. This is something to notice in the context of what am I willing to die for. Notice this advice. I'll read it out of the Revised Standard Version.

**Proverbs 4:26** *Take heed to the path of your feet, then all your ways will be sure.*  
(RSV)

Meaning, consider the direction you're going, consider what you want to do, think it through, because there are consequences to whatever path you choose, whatever road you walk down, whatever decision you make—there are consequences. So that leads back to this very important question, what am I willing to die for. I believe it's a decision that all of us are going to have to make before God is finished with us in this life. We are going to have to show God what we are willing to die for and probably what we're not willing to die for, and God will test us to see.

Let's look at some things, as we approach the end of the sermon, that we might consider when thinking about what we'd be willing to die for. I'm sure you can think of many things. I'm just going to briefly mention three:

### **1. It must be of ultimate importance; it must be salvational.**

It must have a direct bearing on our salvation and on our relationship with God. Let's have a thought experiment here. Let's take two very converted Christians and they obey God to the best of their ability, and one Christian knows the truth about the Stone of Scone and the other Christian doesn't—has it all wrong for whatever reason. Or you could pick the 144,000 if you wish. These two follow the commandments, they love God with all their heart, they treat their neighbor as they would like to be treated but one has the truth about the Stone of Scone, or the 144,000, and one does not. Okay, the thought experiment is this: Is one condemned to the lake of fire because he has this one doctrine wrong, while the other one, who had it right, goes into God's Kingdom? And the other one is out there pounding on the door—if I only understood the Stone of Scone then I'd be in God's Kingdom. You see, if you think that through, that tells us that what we are ready to die for must be absolutely proved, must be essential to our salvation, to our relationship to God and Christ and to being obedient to Them. The example of the three young men and the example of the apostles pertain directly to that—absolutely to that. It has to be of ultimate salvational importance. So on the subject of being willing to die for something, we might ask this question next:

### **2. How does this teaching affect how I live my day-to-day life?**

Let's compare the idolatry of Daniel 3 to the Stone of Scone. If we were to deny God—let's say, if there were an image and we were told to bow down to it, and we said, what's the difference, God understands, and we bowed down to it—what would happen? How would that affect our daily life? It would immediately and directly affect our relationship with God. Let's go to Isaiah 59:1; you know where we're going but in context let's just read it and see what it says, in the context of what we're ready to die for or not.

**Isaiah 59:1** *Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear.* (KJV)

We know God heard the prayers of those three young men. Verse 2.

*2) But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.* (KJV)

If we were to bow down to an idol or to put something in front of God, then God says, okay, you want to put something in front of Me, therefore I'm not going to talk to you any more—you're not going to hear the lead of My Spirit in your life. I am not going to come and rescue you, as I didn't rescue Israel and I didn't rescue Judah. So the immediate result of denying God, in this comparison of bowing down to an idol versus having

knowledge of the Stone of Scone, is that our lives would be changed and affected immediately, because we would be separating ourselves from God. How important is that?—that's of ultimate importance. Okay, how would the knowledge of the 144,000 affect me today? Let's just say, if God put into our head the true meaning of the 144,000, how would it affect the living of one's life tomorrow? Not one bit really. It's interesting to study, it's good to know, but would it change the day-to-day living of one's life today, tomorrow, and the next day? Would it change one's relationship with God? I'm not saying it isn't good to know or it isn't something we should study, my point is, for it to be something that we're willing to die for, it would have to be something that would impact and change our day-to-day life and our relationship with God.

The third one, which is obvious, but I'll mention it anyway:

### **3. We have to be totally convinced.**

Before we say, I'm ready to die for this, we obviously have to be totally convinced. Let's go to Romans 14:5. I'm going to read this out of the New King James. The subject here is eating of certain foods.

**Romans 14:5** *One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. (NKJV)*

Before we started keeping the Sabbath, we had to be convinced that this was what God wanted us to do. We were willing to give up careers or jobs and endure scoffing and persecution to do that. Verse 23.

*23) But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin. (NKJV)*

We have to be, in all faith, convinced that this is something that we are prepared to die for. When push comes to shove and the rubber meets the road, this is something I'm prepared to die for. Let's jump over to James 1:5. I'll read this out of the New King James also.

**James 1:5** *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.*

*6) But let him ask in faith, with no doubting [the King James says "wavering"—"nothing wavering"], for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.*

*7) For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;*

*8) he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (NKJV)*

We have to be totally convinced; we can't say, maybe yes, maybe no, about something we are ready to die for obviously. We can't say, it doesn't make any difference, so we can do this, we can do that. No, that's not what we're talking about here. Once we pull the trigger, we can't go back. Once you commit to following God—we commit to



following God at baptism and every day of our life—you can't go back. Let's go to Luke 9:62. Christ is talking about going back or looking back. In this context, it's talking about doubting, or thinking, oops, maybe I shouldn't have made this commitment.

**Luke 9:62** *And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, [we put our hands to the plough when we were baptized] and looking back, [meaning going back to where we came from or doubting if we made the right decision] is fit for the kingdom of God. (KJV)*

Once we make that decision, we have to look forward and not back. To be ready to die for a doctrine, we have to be totally convinced, and know that we know, and it has to be true and it has to be salvational. So these are things to consider when we meditate and ask the question, what am I really ready to die for. It's a good thing to meditate on, it's a good thing to think about, particularly since the Passover is going to be on us before we know it.

Let's summarize this hopefully in a comprehensible way. We have seen that there are beliefs that we should be ready to die for. The apostles did, those young men did, and putting God first was at the top of that list: Nebuchadnezzar, there's a higher power than you and we're not going to obey you but rather obey this higher power, and because He said not to bow down to the idol, we must not care what you do to us—we will not bow down, and if it means walking into a furnace heated so hot it kills the people around us, we're willing to do that. And the apostles, when they were told not to speak Jesus' name, were in the temple the next day, right where they'd been before, and they were saying, in effect, to the high priest and all of his minions, we must not obey your demands—there is a higher power that we answer to. Not to the high priest, not to the local rabbi—we answer to God Almighty. Putting God first is at the top of the list. Refusing to obey the laws of man and committing to obey the laws of God, not breaking the Sabbath or the holy days, that is something that is right up there, too, because it's a demonstration of putting God first. If we say, I put God first, and then we violate the Sabbath—His day of rest—what does that say about our commitment to God? Obviously our commitment to God is compromised if we break the commandments, if we break the Sabbath or holy days, or in any way put something in front of or ahead of God Almighty.

Coming down the list of doctrines that you might meditate on or think about, there are doctrines and teachings that are frankly not salvational, and they may be speculative, where we might properly decide, I'm not willing to die for that one because it doesn't affect my daily life; I'm not sure because it might be speculation or it's interesting but that's not something for which I'm going to put my life on the line. We have to put first things first. There's a famous saying (I've looked for years trying to find out who said it but I've never been able to pin it down) that goes, "I can't remember what I'm arguing about but I'm ready to die for it." Sometimes we get in battles about stuff that doesn't make a hoot in a whirlwind. We have to put first things first. Remember when Christ was asked the question: What is the great commandment? Christ said, it's pretty simple. The first one is love God with all your being, with all your heart, with all your

mind, with all your energy, with all your life—put God first. That's the first commandment. Then He said there's another one like it (meaning a reflection of love for God): you should love your neighbor as yourself. That's pretty simple. It is putting first things first because loving God with all our heart puts God first. Loving our neighbor as ourself allows us to shed the love of God to those around us, setting a good example hopefully. Let's go to 1 Corinthians 13. This is the last scripture that we will read today. 1 Corinthians 13:1. I know you know this but let's cover it in the context of what we are willing to die for.

**1 Corinthians 13:1** [Paul says] *Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity [the King James says charity; we know it means love], I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.*

2) *And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, [think about that—having faith to move a mountain] and have not charity, [notice these last three words, something to keep in mind] I am nothing. (KJV)*

A lot of people put a lot of things before the love of God and we're being told here directly that having and demonstrating the love of God is more important than the things we just read about. I am nothing—if I do all of this but I don't have the love of God.

3) *And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. (KJV)*

This tells us that we can do good works or we can even be burned at the stake but if we have wrong motives in doing good works, if we have wrong motives—meaning we do the good works to make ourselves feel better or we do good works to aggrandize ourselves—that's all about us, it's not about God. Here in verse 3, it doesn't count a thing if we don't have love—love for God first. Verse 8.

8) [Love] *Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. (KJV)*

Now he gets to the point in verse 9.

9) *For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. (KJV)*

Why in part? Because we are imperfect human beings and there are things that God has not yet chosen to reveal. I believe God is revealing a lot in the last two or three years but He hasn't revealed everything. There is so much we don't know. We keep pursuing and we keep hoping God reveals as He deems correct for us, good for us. But we are imperfect and we see in part, we know in part. Verse 10.

10) *But when that which is perfect is come [when God and Christ come and we're made Spirit beings], then that which is in part shall be done away. (KJV)*

Then we will clearly understand things we had not understood before, maybe even up to our death—many things; when we die, whenever that is, there are going to be a lot of things that we don't understand. You go back into the prophets and the apostles, there were many things they didn't understand either and they died. Someday it will all be revealed. Verse 11.

11) *When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.* (KJV)

He's drawing an analogy to his present day and obviously to us today, too.

12) *For now* [Paul is speaking of his present time, when he was writing this] *we see through a glass, darkly* [we don't see everything clearly because God has chosen not to reveal everything all at once]; *but then face to face* [there will be a time, face to face—what a day]:

This is the Apostle Paul, who studied at the feet of Gamaliel, and Paul says, now I know *in part* what God has chosen to reveal to me,

12 continued) *... now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.* (KJV)

We, as human beings—let's think about this—not one of us has all the answers. No one human being, no one leader, no one group, no one apostle, no one prophet, has had all the answers. The only human being to walk this earth who had all the answers was Jesus Christ. We can be assured of that. We have to have the humility to believe that we don't have all the answers.

Some people have set themselves up to say, I have all the answers. No human being has all the answers. We humbly seek the answers and ask God to reveal the answers, in His time, knowing that is what is best for us. Since Christ was the only one who knew all the answers, we'd better be careful about where we draw a line in the sand. We don't want to draw a line in the sand about something we know of only in part or that is speculative or has some interpretation that is extreme.

The message from God is clear, when you look at all the scriptures, that there are things we must be ready to die for. The three young men in Daniel's time and the apostles in their time have set the example for us as to what we should be prepared to die for: loving God and putting God first in our lives, then demonstrating that love to all those around us. As we go forward to Passover, let's make sure that we know what we are ready to die for.