

# Against the Flow

by Jim Cymbala

---

*We must stand firm in our convictions and refuse to conform to the world's values and pressures, trusting in God's deliverance and having eternal life.*

**Duration:** 26:41

**Scripture:** Daniel 3:25, Matthew 10:28, Acts 7:59-60, Acts 12:1-2, Acts 14:22, James 1:8, Revelation 2:10

**Topics:** "Following Christ"

---

## Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares his experience of preaching in a public setting and facing disdain and mockery when he mentioned God and Jesus. He draws a parallel to the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who were thrown into the fire but were miraculously protected by God. The speaker emphasizes that not everyone who stands for Jesus will be delivered from suffering, as seen in the examples of Stephen and James who were martyred. However, he encourages believers to remain steadfast and not compromise their faith, reminding them that when they suffer for Christ, there will be a visitation of God in their lives.

---

## Transcript

The Bible tells us in Acts 14 that on their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas went back to the cities they had been in, difficult places in terms of persecution, and they encouraged the believers there to remain true to the faith. And then they said, for it is, we told you this before, it's through much hardship that we must enter the kingdom of heaven. Listen again.

They went back and said to the guys who had been converted and the women, stay at it and keep true to the faith because, don't be surprised by what goes on, because it's through much hardship, real persecution was going on there, something we're not familiar with yet, but in certain parts of the world it's been going on. It's through much hardship that we enter the kingdom of heaven, so you have to remain true to the faith. I believe a day is coming.

It's increasing more and more now, but a day is coming, should the Lord tarry, where it's really going to be very, very difficult to be a Christian. I wish I could tell you I felt otherwise, but every indication is that we're going to have to learn from the lessons that people have had in the past. For example, thousands of years ago, the Jewish people were brought into captivity in the empire of Babylon, the Babylonian empire, and what they did was they took the choicest young men out of Israel, out of Judah, men like Daniel and others, and brought them to be trained in the ways of the Babylonian empire so that they could take the

elite of the Jewish population and use them for their own benefit.

So these elite young men were put in training, physical, intellectual, and they learned all about the culture of the Babylonian empire. Three of them were renamed and given the names Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and they were serving as leaders in the Babylonian empire, and one day it got into the heart of Nebuchadnezzar that he will build a gold statue 90 feet high, nine feet wide, and however he got this idea in his head, and he should have known better because he already had some light about the true God, he not only built the idol, this monstrous monument, but a word was sent out through the entire Babylonian empire, and that included like everything in that whole area of the Middle East going from Egypt all the way to India, from India all the way to Egypt and across to the Mediterranean. And it was this, when a certain song goes on and certain music is played, everybody will bow down to this monument, this gold statue, statue 90 feet high.

Everybody got to know the song, and when the music played, a lot of instruments, it was like an anthem, and when that anthem was played anywhere, you bowed down to the idol, to the monument that Nebuchadnezzar had made. Well, some certain Chaldeans got the ear of Nebuchadnezzar and said, isn't it right what you said that when that song is played and that certain anthem is played, everybody bows down, or they are thrown into the fire. You bow or you burn.

You bow down and you acknowledge what we say you should acknowledge, or you are going to burn. And isn't that strange that that same attitude is more and more prevailing in the world. You either do it our way, or we're going to come after you.

It's interesting that they didn't say, oh look, we're making this statue. Everybody who feels that they should bow down to it, no, no, no, it wasn't that way. You have to conform to what the culture and the society says.

And Nebuchadnezzar says you bow down, and he had little underlings who were watching for people who didn't bow down. Well, the Jewish people knew that you don't bow down to any idol, and no physical object should be reverence. They knew that.

That came with the Ten Commandments. So the report came to Nebuchadnezzar, you know, three of your young leaders there in the province of Susa, they're not bowing when we play the anthem. They refuse to bow.

And Nebuchadnezzar flipped out. He went totally nuts, the Bible says. And he said, what? I gave an order.

I gave an edict that when that music is played, you bow to that thing that I made. That thing is gold. That's a fortune.

And when I say you bow, you bow. But he was up against another kind of spirit. He was up against people who were ready to go against the flow.

You know, in society, we use the phrase, you got to go with the... But if you're really going to follow God, one of the things you learn is you got to go against the flow. And I'm telling you now, it's different than already when Alvin was a child, or I was a child. It's a different country we live in.

More and more, the brackets are being tightened that you can do any filthy abominational kind of thing, but you don't mention Jesus. Do you realize that beside up to the highest form of government, the highest

officer of the land, now endorsing the highest official in the land, endorsing same-sex marriage, which for 3,000 years, no one had ever thought, no culture, no religion had ever endorsed that. So it's becoming very politically incorrect to be a Christian.

And people can pick up the scent in your life if you stand for Christ. If you believe in God, if you believe in right or wrong, people can pick it up. And they'll glorify any kind of thing.

But if it mentions Christ, you're going to have to go against the flow. Like Jesus said, in this world, you will have trouble, but don't be afraid for I have overcome the world. Yeah, let's put our hands together.

He has overcome the world. I want you to notice in this story of the unyielding nature of the powers that be. No option.

You bow or you burn. The society set it out. You either do it our way or we're going to come after you.

So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were reported. Nebuchadnezzar went berserk and he called them forward. Didn't I tell you? You're leaders.

I brought you here. And didn't you know that when that anthem is played and the instruments all play, didn't you know that you're supposed to bow? And they tell me now that you alone, you're not going to bow, but you better bow. Because if you don't bow, I'm going to put you in a furnace of fire.

You're going to burn to a crisp. And then he mocked them by saying, and then what God will help you when I say to do that. And then they replied this way.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied to the king. Oh, Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. 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. But here's the clincher. 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 that you have set up.

Yeah, let's just put our hands together for that kind of moral courage. I'm warning you now that those of you that are Christians and I'm warning myself, I want to strengthen us all. We're either going to have to serve Christ with all our heart, or we're going to fall by the wayside.

We got to remain true to the faith. I don't care if you live in Vandevere projects or downtown Brooklyn or Coney Island or Queens or the Bronx or wherever you live. Unless I'm reading this wrong, it's going to become more.

There's like an insidious hatred about anything that has to do with the true God, the father of our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ. You can bring up any abomination and you can get a hearing and you can get article written about you, but you just bring that up. And you got a heap of trouble coming at you.

That's the media. That's the government. Every place you go right to the White House, there is a, an unsettled attitude.

Now it's not manifested. People run it for office as Christians, but their true colors come out. They know where it's convenient to get elected to say, Oh, I believe in this and I believe in that.

But Jesus said, you'll know a tree by its fruit. So now what kind of convictions that these guys have to say, Hey, listen, we're not going to defend ourselves. Yo, this is the way it is.

You put us in that fire. Our God is greater than the fire and he can deliver us. But even if he doesn't deliver us, so you kill us.

There's something worse than death and that's to be a coward. Did you hear me? There's something worse than dying. It's not living for the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's being lukewarm. Death is that we're all going to die. It's all going to die with Chad, drag me, shaking a bender.

Go. We're saying you think you're going to hold power over us because you're going to threaten death. There's something greater than death.

God is greater than death. Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life. He did believe it than me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.

I want to tell all of you it's already happening in countries. I've already been to, I ministered to people in Hong Kong who were from mainland China, half of whom had served jail time just for being a Christian. You go over to places right now in Pakistan, Egypt, you're a Christian, you're in a service like this on a Sunday night, they might burn your church down while you're meeting in it.

We have brothers and sisters who are facing a lot right now. Ours is just peer pressure right now. A little cultural pressure, mocking and just being excluded.

If they find out that you believe in Jesus Christ, if you believe in nothing, if you justify every evil, you're on their team. But if you stand for right or wrong, they pick it up. I'm telling you, they can pick it up before you even witness to them.

How many know what I'm talking about? Just lift your hand. Okay. We got to have this attitude of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Hey, I'm not backing up because of you. Not be arrogant, not be nasty, but there's coming a time now more and more where we're going to have to stand, stand our position and say, listen, I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. I believe he died for the sins of the world.

I believe there's a right and there's a wrong, and I'm not backing up. I don't care who you are. You have no authority over us.

You're not going to take away our spiritual convictions. They grabbed them and they put them in the fire. So I want you to notice two lessons that we learned so far.

Notice the take it or leave it, bow or burn attitude of the culture. We're moving toward that. Number two, I want you to notice the only attitude if you're going to serve God that you can have, which is an absolute stubborn.

I will not back down. I've decided to follow Jesus and I'm not turning back and I'm not bowing to your idols and your gods. And now notice, notice they could have compromised and said, and this is the day we live in now.

We're living in a day where people are bowing to the idol and then going to church on Sunday. And you can't do that. They could have said this.

Well, you know what? We'll bow to the idol because then later on we'll pray to the true God, but they knew you can't do that. I'm telling everybody here, you can't have it both ways. You can't bow to the idol during the week and then go to church on Sunday.

You're just fooling yourself. Come on. How many have decided to follow Jesus? No matter what, not going to do that.

We're not going to do that. You can't talk like the world and use their filthy language. You can't follow their, their love of money and live for materialism.

You can't do that. And then sing amazing grace on Sunday. It doesn't wash.

You got to make a stand. You got to be a peculiar people. You got to stand out like a sore thumb and let everybody know, no, I follow Jesus Christ.

Come on. One more. Amen.

To say to that, I follow Jesus Christ. And some of you here, you're missing a peace and a joy because you're compromising. You can't compromise.

Christ died on the cross for us was stripped naked and was crucified in front of hundreds of people. And now you and I are going to be ashamed of them. Remember the warning that Jesus gave anybody who's ashamed of me, I'll be, my father will be ashamed of them.

You can't be ashamed of Jesus. Can't be ashamed of Jesus. We got to be like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

It is what it is. I am a Christian. Don't you be trying to pressure me.

They were thrown in the fire, but Oh wow. Look what happened. Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked the advisors.

Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire? They replied, certainly. Oh, King. He said, look, I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed.

And the fourth looks like the son of the gods. Come on. Can we say amen to that? Amen to that.

Now what's the lesson? The lesson is I'm going to real talk, real talk now. Not everybody gets out of the fire and gets delivered. Some people burned to death.

Stephen was martyred in the book of Acts. James had his head cut off. Jesus said this, these things will happen.

They'll persecute you, but hold on even to the point of death and you'll receive the crown of life. He told that to a church in revelation. So all the endings aren't, you know, some miraculous deliverance, but whether he pulls you out or brings you through, the thing is you can't deny your convictions in the Lord Jesus Christ, because there's life after death.

Listen, my mom's the oldest in the building right now. She's sitting here 97 years old, but her life is a vapor. You got an eternity.

You're going to be somewhere a billion years from now. You think anyone's going to matter a billion years from now? What somebody thought of you here in New York city, what your job thought of you, what the Democrats or the Republicans thought was right. You think anyone's going to care about that? No, you got to hold onto the anchor.

You got to hold onto that rock, Christ Jesus. And we got to be adamant. And we got to say whether he delivers me or not, you're not making me back up.

But here's the lesson. Whenever you stand for Jesus, there's going to be a visitation of God in your life. When they were in that fire, somebody came to be with them.

And that somebody was, it seems a manifestation of Christ before he was even born of the Virgin Mary. So here's what we got to remember. Whenever we stand with him, whenever we suffer a little bit and you get people mocking you, I remember being down at the promenade.

I was in that little park there and they were filming me for a video I did for Zondervan on the Holy spirit. People saw they had lit me up and put me there and they were waiting for it to get darker so that the lights of the skyscrapers could be seen and the cameras guy ready is ready to roll. And all these, you know, the yuppies down there in the park running around.

And they all thought like, is this guy famous? Who's this guy that filming? Is it a commercial? What is this? What's going on? Let's go. And about 15 of them gathered. And I knew it.

And I could feel the pressure because I knew when that camera said roll and they wanted me to talk, I knew what I was supposed to talk about. And I could feel the disdain that I knew was coming. A couple of them were eating ice cream cones.

It was a summer night and they said, three, two, one go. I said, you see these lights behind here? The lights behind here are lighting up Manhattan, but there's a greater light. There's a light.

Jesus said, I am the light of the world. There's the light that God has. And the minute, the minute I said, God, the minute I said, Jesus, there you boy, if looks could kill, I would have been more.

I would have died on the spot. And they all broke out, just walked away instantly gone. The crowd was gone.

And one guy just was eating ice cream cones. Just looked at me with such anger. Like, what are you trying to sell us? There's a God, there's light, there's darkness.

No, I decide if there's light or darkness. No, sir, you don't decide that there's light or darkness. God's going to have the last word.

And that last word for us is going to be victory and a home in heaven. There will always be a visitation of God to our lives. When you suffer with him for the Bible says in the new Testament, if we suffer with him, we will also reign with him.

If there's no cross, there's no crown. Come on, wake up everybody here. If you're going to go with the flow and try to fit in with your family and your culture and whatever, you're going to try to fit in, but have a little Jesus on the side.

I'm warning you now that will never wash. Jesus said narrow is the way that leads to eternal life. Wide is the road that leads to destruction and many find it.

There's a way that seems right to a person, but the end is destruction. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego said, no, we're not bowing. We're not bowing to your idols.

We're not fitting in with your culture. We're serving the God that we know is real. And look what happened.

God visited them and helped them. He will always help us how he helps us, what he brings us through, what he brings us out of that's his business. But one day we're going to all be with him forever and ever.

But imagine the fellowship we're going to have, like maybe God will say, you know, for a million years, just hang out and get to know each other. Just talk and sing and forever without an end. Here's what the testimony is I want over our lives as we close.

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. You know what makes the greatest impression? Not when you bend for people, not when you try to yield and fit in and go with the flow that doesn't impress anybody because they can see the compromise in your life.

The thing is to keep a spirit of kindness and humility and love, but be like a rock. I'm not bowing and I'm not serving your gods. I'm not going to talk like you and I'm not going to think like you because I belong to the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

One last hand clap. Come on and pray. You got to make up your mind now.

Everybody here in this building, you're going to be a Christian. You're going to have to go against the flow. You're going to serve Jesus.

You have to say, I won't bow and don't tell me you're going to burn me. Do whatever you have to do, but I'm not bowing and I'm not going to serve your gods and I'm not going to follow and pattern my life after that silliness that you're into. No, I have decided to follow Jesus and I'm not turning back.

If you're here in the balcony or downstairs and you say, pastor, I needed to hear that word because I'm being attacked in ways that only God and I know about. Could be family, could be culture, could be your job, could be the school you go to, could, but you have been under attack. Why else would the Lord lay this on my heart? Except that maybe God knows that there's some people here.

You need not to be wobbly. No wobbly believers are leaving this building. Nobody's wobbling out of here.

We're marching out of here. We're going to be strong in the Lord and in this power of his might. Anybody from the balcony or downstairs say, pastor, that was for me.

I have determined today I am going to be Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. I'm not bending. I'm not bowing.

I'm not serving. I don't care about anything. I'm following Jesus.

Just stand up where you are. You're under attack now. Your walk, your conviction.

Thank you. Thank you. The minute you stand, come up out of your seat and come up here quick.

Come on, run quickly. Come on, come down from the balcony. Every eye closed.

Pastor, I'm not compromising. I'm not living one way during the week and then another way to fit in with my family, my posse, my friends, my culture, people from my island, my white people, my black people. I'm not doing any of that anymore.

I'm following Jesus 24-7. That's the way it is. Some of you really need to do this.

You can't compromise and be ashamed of Christ. Come on, after he died for you, you're going to be embarrassed of him? Are you kidding me? How could we even be embarrassed of Jesus? You come up here and stand. Come on, you come down from the balcony too.

You need to tell God, no more of this nonsense in my life where I'm half a Christian, half this other thing in the world and the party spirit and this spirit, that spirit, every kind of thing. No, I'm Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. I'm not bowing.

I'm not going to follow that way. I'm serving Jesus. I'm thinking about where I am a million years from now, not what somebody thinks.

Are you kidding that somebody thinks bad of you in 2012 in New York City? Who cares? Who cares? Who cares what the government says? Who cares what the media glorifies? Who cares? We're going to go by the word of God. We want to hear, well done, my good and faithful servant. I want to hear the applause of men.

The Bible says some people miss out with God because they love the applause of men rather than the favor of God. I don't want people applauding me. I want God to look down and say, he's real.

He really believes in me. Come on. I'm just going to say a prayer.

Then we're going to dismiss. But right now we're focusing on one thing. Father God, help my brothers and sisters here not to be double-minded, unstable in all their ways.

Help them to be fervent for you. We're either going to serve you with all our heart or we're not. And we don't need any religious emotionalism Lord on Sundays to make up for compromise during the week.

We want the spirit of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. I believe in Jesus. I am a born again Christian.

There is a right and a wrong. I'm not going to do the wrong by his grace. I'm going to do the right.

He's going to help me. God put iron in the souls of these people. Help us to be strong Lord.

When people smirk and laugh and give their little innuendos or mock us, help us to just stand quiet and strong and sweet, but unmoved, unshakable, strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. God, I don't know what's going to happen, but I got a bad feeling Lord in my bones that it's going to be more and more unpopular to stand for Christ. But it is what it is.

Our job is not to watch what people are doing. Our job is to be what you want us to be Lord. So God, there is a fountain.

There's a king. There's one who reigns forever and we're going to serve him. Everybody in the building stand up on your feet.

Lift up your right hand. Everybody in the building lift up your right hand. Repeat after me.

I pledge allegiance to Jesus Christ, my Lord and my Savior. He died for me. He rose again from the dead.

I'm going to spend eternity in his presence. I will not turn back. I don't care what anyone says.

I'm following Jesus. I'm going to live by the word of God. So help me God all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever and ever.

Amen. Let's put our hands together.

---

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/24/SID24442.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jim-cymbala/against-the-flow/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**