

Faith in the Fiery Furnace

Lesson for February 11, 2024

Unit III: The Righteous Live by Faith

Adult Topic: Worth Risking Our Lives

Background Scripture: Daniel 3:1-30

Printed Text: Daniel 3:19-28a

Key verse: “Then Nebuchadnezzar said, “Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants!” (Daniel 3:28a, NIV)

It is possible to evade a multitude of sorrows through the cultivation of an insignificant life. Indeed, if a man's ambition is to avoid the troubles of life, the recipe is simple: shed your ambitions in every direction, cut the wings of every soaring purpose, and seek a life with the fewest contacts and relations. If you want to get through the world with the smallest trouble, you must reduce yourself to the smallest compass. Tiny souls can dodge through life; bigger souls are blocked on every side. As soon as a man begins to enlarge his life, his resistances are multiplied. Let a man remove his petty selfish purposes and enthrone Christ, and his sufferings will be increased on every side.

Paul Borthwick, *Leading the Way*, Navpress, 1989, p. 86.

Key Terms

1. **Bound** (verse 21) – Confined; fastened by or as if by a band.
2. **Cast** (verse 21) – In general “to throw,” with various degrees of violence; to cause to move or send forth by throwing.
3. **Changed** (verse 19) – Alter; transform; to make different in some particular.
4. **Command/commandment** (verse 22) – Orders or earnest urging or advising given by authorities.
5. **Fiery** (verse 20) – Of the fire; shining; blazing.
6. **Spake** (verse 19, KJV) – Uttered words or articulated sounds with the ordinary voice; talk.

Lesson Background

Daniel was written to record events during Daniel's lifetime in exile in Babylon as well as to provide exiled Jews hope regarding God's plan for the future. The example of Daniel and his three friends offered a positive role model for Jews living in a pagan culture, while his prophecies encouraged readers and hearers of God's future hope for His people.

The first chapter of Daniel explained how four captive Israelite boys – Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah – became respected advisors to a Babylonian king. They were given Babylonian names: Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 1:7). Chapter 2 showed these men praying for divine wisdom to untangle that same king's dream. These events set the stage for Chapter 3 and the famous trio of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. The men refuse to bow to an idol and are rescued from fiery death by God. This is the last mention of these men in Scripture, as focus shifts back to Babylon's kings and the prophet Daniel.

In Daniel 3:1-18, King Nebuchadnezzar calls representatives from government offices all over Babylon to participate in the introduction of a golden head representing himself as the leader of Babylon (Daniel 3:1–2). The king commands all those in attendance to bow and worship this image upon hearing a certain musical cue. That demanded obedience, so the king threatens a gruesome death to anyone who disobeys this order (Daniel 3:3–7). Loyalty and submission were likely the main purpose of this golden idol. For most people in that era, submitting to his command would have been well within their religious convictions.

A group from the “Chaldeans,” or astrologers, accuse Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego of disobeying the king's command. This is described as “malicious” by a phrase implying spite and ill intent. The complaint is not inspired by loyalty to the king, but by pure hatred for the Jews. It's entirely possible the accusers had no idea whether their accusation was true, but merely hoped to harass the three men or see if the king's short temper would take over (Daniel 3:8–12).

Daniel is notably absent from this incident. Commentators speculate that he was away on business and was not called to the ceremony. It's also possible that Daniel was considered too powerful and too popular with the king to threaten at this time. Daniel's absence or the accusers' cowardice are the most likely reasons he is not part of this story.

Despite being furious, Nebuchadnezzar asks the three Hebrew men if the charges are true. At the same time, he provides a way for them to prove their loyalty through obedience. Most likely, the king intended to command the musical signal at once so they could bow before the idol. He also gloats about his own power, suggesting that no being, even a divine one, could save them if they refused (Daniel 3:13–15).

Whether the accusation was invented or not, the three Hebrew men tell the king not to bother with his test. They have not worshipped the idol, and they will not worship it, even if it means their own death. Instead of fear of Nebuchadnezzar, they express trust in their God. Their Lord can save them, but even if they die, they will continue to obey Him instead of a pagan king (Daniel 3:16–18).

Lesson in Depth

I. Faith's Risk (Daniel 3:19-23)

If their jealous political enemies (whom they now outranked in the Babylonian court — see Daniel 1:20 & Daniel 3:8) had not told him, Nebuchadnezzar probably would never have known that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had disobeyed him and not bowed before his statue/idol. When they declared that they would only worship the one true God, Nebuchadnezzar became enraged.

Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury: No matter how brave Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego were, facing the fury of a king was still extremely intimidating. We get the feeling that prior to their statement Nebuchadnezzar spoke kindly, almost in a fatherly manner to these wayward boys. After hearing their bold challenge, **the expression on his face changed.**

Cast them into the burning fiery furnace: Nebuchadnezzar ordered that they be thrown into the fiery furnace which was to be made perfectly or completely hot (the meaning of “seven times hotter”). With respect for the king’s office as an earthly ruler over them, they tactfully told him that God was greater than the king (for God could save them from the blazing fire and they would obey God whenever the king’s laws conflicted with God’s law. They declared, “If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know your majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up” (Daniel 3:17-18). God was able to and did publicly deliver them from Nebuchadnezzar’s. God enabled them to live through the blazing fire on earth for all to see; thereby delivering them from Nebuchadnezzar’s hand. God could have chosen to deliver them from Nebuchadnezzar’s hand by taking them from earth to live with Him in heaven, but God had a higher purpose and plans for them on earth (see Daniel 3:28). They chose to let God decide their future one way or the other, and they have become an example for all people, because they chose to obey God’s law regardless of the consequences: “You shall have no other gods before me” (Deuteronomy 5:7).

Despite the intense intimidation, the men stayed courageous in their confession of faith. Spurgeon eloquently described the horror of those who lose their courage at such times: “Remember also that by yielding to the fear of man you are demeaning yourself. There shall come a day when the man that was ashamed of Christ will himself be ashamed: he will wonder where he can hide his guilty head. Look at him! There he is! The traitor who denied his Lord! The Christ was spat upon and nailed to the cross, and this man was afraid to own him. To win the smile of a silly maid, to escape the jest of a coarse fellow, to win a few pieces of silver, to stand respectable among his fellow-men, he turned his back upon his Redeemer and sold his Lord; and now what can be said for him? Who can excuse him? The angels shun him as a man who was ashamed of the Lord of glory. He is clothed with shame and everlasting contempt. Even the lost in hell get away from him, for many of them were more honest than he. Is there such a man as this before me? I summon him in the name of the living God to answer for his cowardice! Let him come forth and own his crime, and humbly seek forgiveness at the hands of the gracious Savior.” (Spurgeon)

Bound in their coats ... were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace: In haste to obey the king as quickly as possible, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were bound fully clothed and thrown into the blazing furnace. With respect for their dignity as His servants, God may have internally restrained the soldiers from dishonoring them. They may have even earned the respect of the soldiers for their bravery in defying the king, whom they did not defy.

The furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: The fire was completely hot, so hot these strong soldiers were killed as they tossed the bound men into the fire. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not survive the fire because they were stronger than others; they survived by the grace of God.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego could not have physically survived the fiery furnace without divine assistance. They were firmly bound and could not escape by running away. They should have been killed instantly and burned to ashes.

II. Faith's Reward (Daniel 3:24-28a)

Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished: It is astonishing that anyone survived for a moment *inside* the furnace when others perished *at the door*.

The Septuagint says in Daniel 3:24 that Nebuchadnezzar's attention was caught when he heard the men singing praises in the furnace. We can imagine that the king had them cast into the furnace and didn't intend to look twice, believing they would be immediately consumed. As he walked away with a satisfied look on his face, he was immediately stopped by the sound of *singing* coming from the furnace. At a safe distance from the raging heat, he peered inside – and saw **four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire**.

King Nebuchadnezzar could not believe his eyes when he saw Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego unharmed by the fire that had just moments before had killed some of his strongest soldiers. King Nebuchadnezzar saw four men instead of three. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego could walk in the fire because of the fourth man, who looked "the Son of God" to use King Nebuchadnezzar's only way of describing what he saw.

God saved them and gave Nebuchadnezzar the opportunity to see how God's power saved them rather than just having them walk around in the furnace by themselves before walking out of the furnace unharmed.

Spurgeon observed that God's people are often in the furnace, and though there are different kinds of furnaces, they serve similar purposes in our life.

- There is the furnace that man prepares.
- There is the furnace that Satan prepares.
- There is the furnace that God prepares.

God can deliver us from a trial, or He can miraculously sustain and strengthen us in a trial.

God is ever present with those who trust Him. This fourth person in the fire is the Son of God. Look, with me, at the beautiful promise that was fulfilled, here, for these 3 men who pleased God.

“When thou passest through the waters, I [will be] with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.” (Isaiah 43:2)

God is a consuming fire, so fire is nothing to Him. They put their faith in the Lord, and He did not fail them. He was in the fire with them, protecting them from its flames. This divine presence will be with us in all of our troubles if we continue to trust in the Lord. God promises us supernatural protection in time of trouble, if we trust in Him.

“A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; [but] it shall not come nigh thee.” (Psalms 91:7)

There were several things to be gained from this. More faith for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. There was also a world looking on, seeing how they would handle this problem. This was a witness to them. The king's heart will be changed.

Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, came forth of the midst of the fire: The king recognizes their God. He, also, recognizes they are in good standing with that God. Nebuchadnezzar will have great respect for them standing up to him in this. They are men of great faith.

It is Nebuchadnezzar, himself, who calls them from the fire. Before they were out of the furnace, Nebuchadnezzar recognized that these men served the *true* God, the God **Most High**.

And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king's counsellors, being gathered together: A satrap was a provincial governor in the Persian empire. A prefect was a chief officer or senior magistrate. The astrologers were not mentioned; they were the ones who had jealously accused Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego of not obeying the king; therefore, they most probably would not have wanted to crowd around the king (Daniel 3:8).

These men on whose bodies the fire had no power: The trial had **no power** over these men because they were thoroughly submitted to the power and will of God. Before the time of Jesus, they knew the truth of Jesus' promise: *In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world* (John 16:33).

The smell of fire was not on them: This demonstrates how complete their deliverance was. When God enacts a miracle, He supernaturally controls all details so that His power is unmistakable and there is no other explanation.

This was an eye opener for all of these people. They see the might of the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. This was a great witness to all of them. They might have been in the fire, but God had been with them and protected them. No false god could do this.

There must have been conversions that day to the One True God. They had been protected so well, there was no smell of smoke upon them. It was as if God had them in a fire-proof capsule. He did, in a sense. They were covered with His robe. The blood of the Lord Jesus Christ covers us, and protects us from the devil.

Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego: Nebuchadnezzar gave glory to God, but he recognized that this great God is not *his* God. He was still **the God of** these three brave men.

Who sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him: In Daniel 3:15 Nebuchadnezzar asked, “who *is* the god who will deliver you from my hands?” Now Nebuchadnezzar knew a great deal about this God.

- He is the God of the Hebrews (the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego).
- He is the God who sends a Savior (who sent His Angel).
- He is the God of great power (delivered His servants).
- He is the God worthy of trust (who trusted in Him).
- He is the God worthy of full surrender (frustrated the king’s word, and yielded their bodies).
- He is the God who demands exclusive allegiance (that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God).

Lesson Summary

This week’s lesson recounts the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, three Jewish captives in Babylon who refused to bow down to the golden image set up by King Nebuchadnezzar. As a result, they were thrown into a fiery furnace but miraculously survived. Here are some lessons that can be gleaned from this passage:

1. **Faith and Trust in God:** Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego demonstrated unwavering faith and trust in God. They refused to compromise their beliefs despite the threat of death. This teaches us the importance of relying on our faith and trusting in God, even in the face of adversity.
2. **Standing Firm in Principles:** The three men stood firm in their commitment to worship only the true God, even when pressured to conform to the king's command. This encourages believers to stand firm in their principles and not be swayed by societal pressures or popular opinions.
3. **God's Deliverance:** The miraculous deliverance of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace illustrates that God is powerful and capable of delivering those who trust in Him. This serves as a reminder that, even in the midst of challenges, God can intervene and bring about deliverance.
4. **Witness to Others:** The courage and faithfulness of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego became a powerful witness to those around them, including King Nebuchadnezzar. Our actions and commitment to God can serve as a testimony to others and may lead them to recognize the greatness of God.

5. **God's Sovereignty:** The passage emphasizes the sovereignty of God over earthly rulers and circumstances. Despite the king's decree and the threat of the fiery furnace, God had control over the situation. This teaches us to acknowledge and trust in God's sovereignty in all aspects of our lives.
6. **Courage in the Face of Persecution:** Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego demonstrated courage when faced with the possibility of persecution. This encourages believers to maintain courage in the face of opposition or persecution for their faith, knowing that God is with them.
7. **Humility and Repentance:** After witnessing the miraculous survival of the three men, King Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged the greatness of the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. This demonstrates the potential for humility and repentance even in powerful leaders when confronted with the reality of God's power.

These lessons from Daniel 3:19-28 provide valuable insights into faith, trust, standing firm in principles, witnessing to others, God's deliverance, sovereignty, courage, and the potential for humility and repentance in the face of divine intervention.