

FAITH FOR THE FIRE

Daniel 3:16-18

INTRODUCTION

- A. Daniel 3:1-6
- B. Nebuchadnezzar was not a man to be messed with.
 - 1. He was a fierce and ruthless warrior.
 - a. He defeated the Assyrians and Egyptians in the great and decisive battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C.
 - b. His armies defeated Judah twice, and the third time demolished Jerusalem.
 - c. When Zedekiah was brought to Nebuchadnezzar, he made Zedekiah watch as he killed all his sons, had his eyes gouged out, and then led him away into captivity in shackles, 2 Kings 25:7.
 - d. ***You didn't mess with Nebuchadnezzar.***
 - 2. He was the leader of a world empire.
 - a. He was king of the largest empire the world had ever known. He was the wealthiest, most powerful, most influential man in all the world.
 - b. His word was law...his whim was reality...Daniel tells us that when Nebuchadnezzar said, "Off with his head" there was no court of appeals, no second opinions.
 - d. ***You didn't mess with Nebuchadnezzar.***
 - 3. He was a proud man.
 - a. He was proud even with God... Dan. 4 tells of God having to humble him. God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to whomever He pleases!
 - b. How much more was he proud with people.
 - i. He didn't take lightly to being ignored or disobeyed.
 - ii. You didn't argue with Nebuchadnezzar...it was "Yes, Sir" or "No, Sir."
 - c. ***You didn't mess with Nebuchadnezzar.***
 - 4. When such a man builds an image and tells you to bow down, you do as he says!
- C. Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah worked for Nebuchadnezzar.
 - 1. Hebrews brought to Babylon at the same time as Daniel.
 - 2. They rose to prominence in Nebuchadnezzar's court along with Daniel.
 - a. They were the three who, with Daniel, asked for kosher food so as not to defile themselves.
 - b. They were taken into the King's service and renamed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.
 - c. They were made administrators of the province of Babylon.
 - 3. They knew about the fiery furnace that was threatened to those who would not bow before the image...and they knew Nebuchadnezzar would not be afraid to use it!
- D. **Transition:** Listen now...You can hear the horns, flutes, harps, and pipes calling people to worship the image. People are beginning to face the idol, fall on their knees and prostrate themselves before the image. What are these three Jews, worshippers of the God most high, to do? Push the pause button.

I. A CLASSIC FAITH DILEMMA.

A. The Context of Faith.

1. There was an **obvious conflict** between what was expected of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego by others and what their own beliefs demanded of them.
 - a. Nebuchadnezzar certainly expects them to submit to his command and bow down before the golden image.
 - b. But they cannot bow to the image and be true to themselves or their God.
2. There was an **obvious risk** involved in not doing what others expected of them.
 - a. It was not just that they might disappoint Nebuchadnezzar by failing to do what he expected of them.
 - b. It was not even that they might lose their positions of authority and power or that they might be economically devastated by their decision.
 - c. The risk in this case was more immediate, more physical than that. There was a furnace that was heated and waiting for any who refused to bow down.
3. There was an **obvious temptation** to make the obvious less obvious.
 - a. Perhaps there is a way to bow without really bowing.
 - i. Bowing down physically doesn't mean you bow down in heart and mind!
 - ii. Maybe they could keep their fingers crossed while they bowed.
 - iii. Perhaps they could drop something and stoop to pick it up!
 - b. Perhaps there are better reasons for bowing than for not bowing.
 - i. Surely one bow is a small price to pay for the ability to wield such godly influence over Babylon.
 - ii. It would be foolish to risk such a powerful position by being stubborn.
 - c. Perhaps there is a way not to bow but to avoid the consequences.
 - i. "O King, we have arthritis and cannot bow down."
 - ii. Begging, groveling, apologizing.

B. Faith is Trusting God no matter the Circumstances or Consequences.

1. Hit the "Play" button...Daniel 3:7-15.
 - a. The actions of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego:
 - i. They couldn't rationalize bowing down.
 - aa. The musical instruments sounded...the throng bowed as one man.
 - bb. There stood the three Hebrews, sticking out like sore thumbs.
 - ii. They are brought before the King to explain themselves.
 - b. The reaction of Nebuchadnezzar.
 - i. He was furious that they had disobeyed him, vs. 13.
 - ii. He was willing to give them another chance.
 - aa. Perhaps they had misunderstood.
 - bb. Perhaps they would rethink their positions.
2. "*They put their trust in Him...*" Dan. 3:28.
 - a. Faith is trusting God no matter the circumstances or consequences.
 - b. Faith will always win out.

II. A CLOSER LOOK AT THE MEANING OF FAITH.

A. Faith is a Verb.

1. We tend to think of "faith" in the sense of "the faith".
 - a. 1 Tim. 3:9, "...but holding to the mystery of the faith..."

- b. Jude 3, “...*contend earnestly for the faith*...”
 - c. “Faith” has come to mean a “body of truths,” a set of facts we espouse.
 - 2. But “faith” is used far more often in the Bible to signify dynamic trust and reliance.
 - a. When Jesus chides His disciples, “*O you of little faith*”, (Mt. 8:26), He is not commenting on the number of their beliefs but on how very small their capacity for trust is.
 - b. “Faith” most often signifies the ability to trust, to believe, to have confidence and to act in a bold and daring manner on the strength of convictions.
 - 3. This story is a good reminder that it is the strength of our faith rather than the particulars of what we believe that is often at stake.
 - a. They knew what God had said, “don’t bow down to idols or worship them” (Ex. 20:4-5).
 - b. But the million dollar question was: would their faith (trust...confidence) be strong enough to allow them to act on that command no matter the consequences?
- B. The Extent of their Faith, Dan. 3:16-18.
1. God was more real to them than Nebuchadnezzar.
 - a. “*We do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter,*” vs. 16.
 - i. Wait a minute: that is precisely why they’ve been called before the King.
 - ii. Implicit in this: Who must they defend themselves before? God!
 - b. There stands Nebuchadnezzar in the flesh...the furnace hot and threatening. But Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego see God more clearly, fear God more fully, determined to obey God more completely than Nebuchadnezzar.
 - c. ***God was more real to them than Nebuchadnezzar – that is faith!***
 2. They believed God had the ability to save them.
 - a. Vs. 17a, “...*our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace...*”
 - b. They not only believed God was real but that He was powerful...that He could reach His hand into the world and make a difference.
 - c. They believed in a God who could act in the here and now.
 - i. Not just a God of the there and then...a God of creation...a God of Sinai and Palestine...a God who acted on behalf of their ancestors.
 - ii. They put their trust in a God who could work powerfully in the present, in Babylon, who could deal with the King and the fiery furnace they faced.
 - d. ***They believed God had the ability to save them – that is faith!***
 3. It is one thing to believe in God’s ability. It is another to trust His willingness.
 - a. Dan. 3:17, They trusted not only in a God who can but one who will.
 - b. They trusted that God knew of their circumstances, that He cared about them and their danger, and that He would intervene powerfully in their behalf.
 - c. Because they trusted in a God who was real, in a God who was able, and in a God who was willing, they exhibited the kind of faith that God’s people need.
 4. The most incredible step of faith of all – Dan. 3:18.
 - a. Even if He did not choose to save them, they trusted Him still and would be obedient to Him regardless.
 - b. If God chose not to save them from the furnace, He would save them in the furnace...if He would not save their lives, He would save their souls.

III. LESSONS FOR OUR FAITH.

- A. We Must Learn that Faith is a Verb.
 - 1. It is all very well to define faith in terms of its contents...
 - a. We believe all the right things, hold all the correct positions, we do not espouse error.
 - b. There is a real sense in which the content of faith determines the power of faith.
 - 2. But the more important aspect of faith – practically speaking – is our ability to trust, to have confidence, to act in a bold and daring manner as a result of faith.
 - a. We can know lots of religious facts and have all our doctrinal ducks in a row.
 - b. But, the crying need today is finding the trust and confidence to act according to what we say we believe.
- B. We Must Learn to Deal with Faith Dilemmas.
 - 1. We find ourselves in situations where there is an obvious conflict between what others expect of us and what our faith demands. Rarely are the situations so dramatic...but they are obvious.
 - a. Moral dilemmas: right vs. wrong.
 - b. Priority dilemmas: urgent vs. important.
 - c. Trust dilemmas: believing vs. doubting.
 - d. Don't think we can fail the small tests and then pass the large ones.
 - 2. Frequently, those situations involve risk if we refuse to live up to others' expectations. Rarely are our lives at risk...but frequently our relationships or reputations.
 - a. We may risk the affection or approval of others.
 - b. We may risk a job, our economic stability.
 - 3. There are constant temptations to make the obvious less obvious.
 - a. Looking for the compromise, the excuse, the rationale, the justification.
 - b. Trying to make disobedience look like obedience, faithlessness look like faithfulness.
 - c. Having your cake and eating it, too...Pleasing God and pleasing men.
 - d. You will face such a situation sometime this week! There are all kinds of furnaces...the point is, there is always a furnace.

CLOSING

- A. If we are to deal successfully with faith dilemmas, we must learn the faith of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.
 - 1. God must become more real to us than any other person or situation.
 - Learning to walk in the presence of God.
 - 2. We must believe that God has the ability to save us.
 - Accepting that God can work in the here and now.
 - 3. We must believe that God is willing to save us.
 - Understanding that God knows what we face and cares about it.
 - 4. We must trust and obey God – **no matter what.**
 - a. We cannot make our faith conditional – God saves us and we will be faithful.
 - b. We trust God to save us, period – if not from the furnace, then in the furnace.