

Faithfulness in the Fire

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[0:00] Well, let's turn to Daniel chapter 3. King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold 90 feet high and 9 feet wide and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.

He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisors, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up.

So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisors, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it.

Then the herald loudly proclaimed, This is what you are commanded to do, O peoples, nations, and men of every language. As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes, and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.

Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.

Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations, and men of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

[1:29] At this time, some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, O King, live forever. You have issued a decree, O King, that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes, and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace.

But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who pay no attention to you, O King.

They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up. Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up?

Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes, and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good.

But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?

[2:55] Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied to the king, O 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 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 you have set up.

Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace.

So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans, and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace.

The king's command was so urgent and the fire so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

[4:14] Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisors, Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire? They replied, Certainly, O king.

He said, Look, I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.

Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening to the blazing furnace and shouted, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out, come here.

So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the fire and the satraps, prefects, governors, and royal advisors crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed.

Their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them. Then Nebuchadnezzar said, Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants.

[5:25] 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.

Therefore, I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way.

Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon. Some people think that the Bible is a book of rules, what you should do and you shouldn't do.

It is a book with rules in it, but the Bible is not mainly about telling you what you should be doing. It's mostly about what God has done already.

And other people think that the Bible is about heroes and showing people that you should copy.

And the Bible does have heroes. And we see some of those heroes in our story today.

[6:35] But most of the people in the Bible were not heroes at all. Actually, most of them made big mistakes. They became afraid. They ran away.

The Bible really isn't a book about rules and it's not really a book about heroes. The Bible is mostly just an adventure story about one young hero who came from a faraway land and rescued to find his lost treasure.

Or it's a love story about a brave prince who gave up everything in order to rescue the one that he loves. And that's important to remember tonight because it would be very easy for me to say, that you should be like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and go and be on your way.

But Daniel chapter 3 is just one chapter in the bigger story about Jesus and about the hero of the whole Bible. They were only faithful because he was faithful.

And so they do give us a brilliant example of what we should be like and what kind of people we should be and an example of overcoming this world. But we have to be very careful that we don't leave it there.

[7:54] We have to get to Jesus or no matter how much I say, be like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, you won't be able to do it. So we have to get to Jesus tonight.

What is Daniel 3 about? It's about being faithful in the fire. Faithfulness in the fire. And we are all in the fire. If we are a believer, we are facing some kind of fire.

The world and Satan are always trying to drag us away from God. And they have two weapons, temptation and terror. And we looked at temptation in chapter 1 and today we look at terror.

If you won't be seduced, you'll be threatened. And tonight we see a story of how God keeps three friends faithful and help them to overcome even when they're facing a fire.

And so the story is written for our encouragement. So let's be encouraged with the example, but also with a God who is so committed to us.

[8:59] Now we have four points tonight and the first point is Nebuchadnezzar's rebellion.

Nebuchadnezzar's rebellion. Now to understand what is going on in Daniel chapter 3, we have to remember what happened in Daniel chapter 2.

What was Daniel chapter 2 about? It was all about a dream that God gave to Nebuchadnezzar about a statue. It was a dazzling, awesome statue.

And you remember what that statue looked like. It had a head of gold and a chest and arms of silver and a belly and thighs of bronze and legs of iron and toes and feet of iron and clay.

And what happened next? Well, an unseen hand cut out a rock and it rolled and it crushed that dazzling statue and then that stone grew and it grew and it grew until it filled the whole earth.

Now what did that dream mean? Well, that head of gold, you know, that was Nebuchadnezzar. He was that head of gold. His empire was glorious and strong and then all the other parts of that statue were other kingdoms that came after him.

[10:13] And that stone that grew into a mountain was God's kingdom that would destroy all the kingdoms of men and fill the entire earth. And so we have to remember that picture if we're going to understand exactly what is going on in chapter 3 because chapter 3 begins with Nebuchadnezzar making a statue and the one thing we know about this statue, it's tall and skinny and it's completely from head to toe made out of gold.

It's covered in gold. So what's the connection between Daniel chapter 2 statue and Daniel chapter 3 and Nebuchadnezzar's statue? That statue and this statue. Well, this statue in Daniel chapter 3 is Nebuchadnezzar's reaction to God's dream.

Did Nebuchadnezzar repent and seek God's kingdom? Did Nebuchadnezzar acknowledge that God is the most high God and that his kingdom will be forever? No. Instead, he rebels and he says the dream is wrong.

My kingdom will last forever. My kingdom will not give way to another kingdom. There will not be a silver or a bronze or an iron. It will be gold. And it will not be crushed.

It will endure. The gold will reach from the top to the bottom. And so this statue is a symbol of Nebuchadnezzar's rebellion against the Lord. And it's a symbol of his desire for his kingdom to last forever.

[11:41] And it's a symbol of Nebuchadnezzar's desire to be worshipped, to be adored, to be feared as the most high king. And you see what he commanded.

Chapter 3, verse 3. He then summoned all the satraps, prefects, governors, advisors, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image. And then verse 4 says, and so all the satraps, prefects, on and on, came before and they stood in front of the statue. So here they are, Nebuchadnezzar's yes-men, his lackeys.

The point of all the repetition of the titles is that he beckons and they come. He calls and they're there without thinking. You want us to bow down? We'll bow down.

You want us to come? We'll come here. You've set up the statue? Fine. We'll do whatever it takes. And isn't that what the people of this world are like? The world says, jump, and world leans, jump.

[12:46] And the world says, bow, and world leans, bow. And now we see just how rebellious Nebuchadnezzar is in verse 4. This is what you are commanded to do, O peoples, nations, and men of every language.

As soon as you hear the music, you must fall down and worship the image of God that Nebuchadnezzar has set up. Now who does Nebuchadnezzar want to worship his statue? All peoples, nations, and men of every language. Now who alone deserves that worship? Who alone deserves for people from every nation and language to worship him?

It's God alone. And so Nebuchadnezzar is claiming something that belongs to God.

Nebuchadnezzar is contending with God. He's putting his kingdom up against God's kingdom. So it's treason. It's rebellion. The clay is fighting with the potter. The mouse is fighting with the cat. The servant is fighting with the king. And is it any different today?

[13:59] Not really. Psalm 2 says, Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his anointed one.

And so in our world today, we are, all the nations are in rebellion against God. Some directly, some inadvertently, some overtly.

Kim Jong-il. You know who he is? Maybe. He's the president of North Korea. And the whole North Korean government is set up, it's all about the worship of Kim Jong-il.

And when I say worship, I really, I mean worship. The government routinely tells the most absurd lies in order to get to stir up worship for their president.

So according to official North Korean documents, Kim Jong-il, when he was born in a cabin at the foot of the most sacred mountain in Korea. And when he was born, a bright star lit up in the sky and winter turned instantaneously to spring and two rainbows shot out of the earth when he was born.

[15:21] According to other government papers, he invented the hamburger like the hamburger you eat. He shot a 38 under par the very first time he played golf. His, he had five holes and ones in that game and he quit after that.

I guess it was just too easy. His birthday is the greatest national holiday in that country. And that seems absurd to us. But it's not absurd to our Christian brothers and sisters in North Korea. It's not absurd to them because they're thrown into prison when they won't conform. and they're forced into slavery or into servitude and their children are taken away from them and they scream under torture and they die horrible deaths.

And they will not bow so they are thrown into the fire. It's no different really in many other countries in Iran.

We prayed some time ago about Pastor Yosef who was condemned to death for not teaching his children the Koran. And of course it was quickly blown completely out of proportion and said he was fomenting rebellion against the Islamic state.

[16:41] And it's all so absurd and yet it's all so real. His wife was thrown into prison as well and his children were taken away. And now the Supreme Court of Iran is deciding his fate.

He would not bow so he was thrown into the furnace. And brothers and sisters do we escape? Will you escape?

This culture that we live in will not sacrifice us on the altar of atheism or on the altar to some great leader but they will sacrifice us on the altar to tolerance and it's not violent yet but there are still statues that you must bow down to in our culture.

The American Dream dirty worldly movies swearing lying premarital sex sexual toleration of all kinds there's still statues and there's still furnaces.

And if you will not bow you'll be scorned you'll be ridiculed you'll be ignored. And so young people older people we face the same choice that Shadrach Meshach and Abednego faced.

[18:00] Will we bow or will we stand? We live in a world where Nebuchadnezzar's rebellion is going on. It's going on all the time in a thousand different ways and it's going on.

So this is the world we live in. Shadrach Meshach and Abednego lived a long time ago but the world still goes on in Nebuchadnezzar's rebellion.

Secondly we see three friends faithfulness. Three friends faithfulness. So all the satraps prefects governors they stand before the statue and then I think we're supposed to think this is a very absurd symphony because it has bagpipes and these other instruments and they're all just playing and I looked this up there was no such thing as harmony at this time and so they're just playing so the most absurd symphony starts blaring and everyone falls down but three men three men and the question that everyone asks is where is Daniel where is Daniel we just don't know maybe he wasn't in town I actually find this one hard to believe because this is especially calling all of the leaders the provincial leaders and it seems like he would be there but maybe he was gone he wasn't there maybe he was too high up in the rankings for these other wise men these other astrologers the court advisors to get him into trouble and so what they're doing is going after the smaller fish and then they'll get the bigger fish later but whatever it is we don't know it's just speculation we can't say but we can talk about these three friends and their faithfulness so what happened well the three friends refused to bow and then the other wise men saw their opportunity they're jealous of these men obviously and so they go and tattle on them to

King Nebuchadnezzar and King Nebuchadnezzar's response was instant rage furious with rage Nebuchadnezzar summons Shadrach Meshach and Abednego and you know what happened next Nebuchadnezzar summons them they come before him and Nebuchadnezzar says one more chance when you hear the symphony play fall down and worship if you do good very good but if you don't I'll throw you straight into the furnace then what God will be able to rescue you from my hand do you see Nebuchadnezzar's ego this is I mean we got this all wrong if we think this is all about Nebuchadnezzar's gods this is really all about Nebuchadnezzar this is connected to him no god will be able to rescue you he exalted himself over all the Babylonian gods all the gods of any place that has been worshipped he is the chief so how do the three friends respond and verse 16 is so beautiful let's read it again oh

Nebuchadnezzar we don't need to defend ourselves before you in this matter in other words we don't need to backtrack we don't need to explain ourselves in any way if we are thrown into the blazing furnace!

[21:30] King Nebuchadnezzar you say that no god can save us from your hand and we say he can our god can and so what motivates their faithfulness what can motivate your faithfulness well it was faith and a power that's higher than any man Nebuchadnezzar is king of kings he's the glorious golden head he's the strongest man on the earth but they see a higher power and what will motivate

faithfulness in your life well it's a sight of the god most high the lord of hosts and it's being able to rest in that kind of god that will give you strength to stand so the three friends by faith they pierced the veil of heaven and they saw a throne that was higher than

Nebuchadnezzar's throne a king who was stronger than any other king and so they stood firm and so what will enjoying and and this kind of power is for me and that's the kind of faith that overcomes and so have you ever been there men on your jobs these men were at work and here they were have you ever been here in the hands of men that are too strong for you in your job in your welfare are in their hands and they're godless they don't care about you you're just a bug to squish if they want and they could fire you and not even lose a wink of sleep well how can you get through that how can you stand and endure that kind of pressure well it's faith it's faith in an omnipotent God that is stronger than any boss stronger than any ruler and that's the kind of faith that overcomes so when we're thrown into prison and when our children are taken away and when our families ignore us and when our friends leave us and the world scorns us and we're there left alone and they've all denounced us where can we stand we can stand by faith and a God who is strong now notice something else about their faith it's it's not a faith that demands absolute safety it's not a faith that demands safety verse 16 clearly opens that possibility that they might die in the fire they know that God can deliver them from the fire they think he's going to but there is this possibility that he might not and so their faith doesn't demand safety and we seriously misunderstand

God and we seriously misunderstand God's promises if we think God promises us safety in this life God doesn't promise you a jail free persecution free pain free life and true faith doesn't demand that he does do doesn't demand that kind of safety if your faith demands earthly safety then you are forever going to be compromising because that's your God if you need to have safety when it's between standing and being safe your faith will give way and you'll choose safety you'll run away you'll disobey and so truth true faith doesn't lay a hold of a God that promises us safety in this world but by faith we lean on a God who promises us everlasting eternal safety and we lean by faith on a God who says my love is better than life we believe in a

God who says when you walk through the waters I will be with you there there are still waters there are still fires he hasn't promised us safety from them but he has promised us eternal safety God hasn't promised us a prison free torture free persecution free death free life but he has promised us that after prison we'll walk in the fair fields of heaven we'll be free there and he's promised that after the pain and the tears that a pierced hand will wipe away those tears and give us comfort and after death he's promised us eternal life that's luscious precious everlasting life so Jesus didn't die to give you life and safety here he died to give you something infinitely better he died to give you

[27 : 22] God himself and so when you were in the fire God would be with you God's presence in the water God's presence in the fire he died to give us power so that in the middle of that pain we could still glorify him we could still experience communion with him and so he died!

so that Stephen when his face beamed and he was able to look into heaven and see Jesus at the right hand of God he died to make us faithful through death he died so that our death would not be defeat but it would be victory so how did these three friends stay faithful facing the fire they had faith in a God that was stronger than any king and they had faith that didn't demand safety but instead looked forward to eternal safety and so acting on faith they said to the king we aren't bowing down we're not doing it so third that brings us to God's vindication they said king we're not bowing down and with that it's literally the king's face changed now he's absolutely livid this is not going at all how he had imagined they weren't giving him what he wanted they weren't recognizing his unbridled unbounded glory and authority and so he said heat the furnace and heat it again heat it seven times hotter than usual and the three friends were tied up and they were bound up with all their clothes on and then strong men grabbed!

seemed like Shadrach Meshach and Abednego their faithfulness it seemed like it led to death and this story would not be any less glorious if it did they proved their faithfulness and just because Isaac didn't die when Abraham offered him up it doesn't mean that Abraham's love was any less sincere and their faithfulness was no less real because they didn't die but it teaches us a lesson God kept those three men back from heaven to teach us a lesson that we can trust him that God will vindicate will declare that we were right for believing in him and so into the fire they dropped and Nebuchadnezzar is sitting looking at the open mouth of the furnace when all of a sudden he leaps to his feet he rubs his eyes he can't believe it in a startled voice he says weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire and his advisor says certainly oh king and look look

I see four men walking around and one looks like the son of the! like one of the sons of the gods and he rushed to the mouth of the furnace and he yelled Shadrach Meshach and Abednego come forth and they come out and they don't even smell like smoke I mean they're not burned at all and they don't even look or smell any way the fire did not touch them in any way and so what happened God is showing us that he can be!

in moments like these so into the fire they went but they didn't go alone with them came one like the son of the gods we don't know who this is exactly it might be Jesus Christ a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus perhaps it was an angel it's impossible to say exactly but what we do know is that God was sending this person this angel it was God who was showing that he was with his people that he was committed to us now when it looks like God has abandoned us that's when God draws near when all hope is lost that's when God shows his great commitment to us and brothers and sisters we can be so blind can't we we're thrown into the fire and we think God is so far away but it's exactly in those moments when God draws near that he says I'll walk with you in the fires [32:04] I'll walk with you in the waters and that's when he sends his angels to surround us and he comes and lives with us so it's in the fires it's in the waters that God draws near to his people and so maybe bring this truth to bear what are you afraid of does the future make you afraid does the future worry you maybe you're afraid of what's going to happen if you make an unpopular stand at school or at work maybe you're afraid to start witnessing because you're not sure what kind of response you're going to get maybe you need to make a difficult call to your children maybe you need to make a stand in your family with your teenagers and you're afraid there's no reason to be afraid because God has promised to be with us and I can't promise you no fire but

I can promise you that God will be with you in that fire that's when God will draw close God is committed to you he's shown that commitment to us and he won't fail us he drew near to Shadrach Meshach and Abednego and you can trust him to give you that grace in that hour to deliver you now we come to the!

point in this point I want to talk about the gospel it's easy to preach a message a sermon that would go something like this Shadrach Meshach and Abednego were very brave and they were faithful to God even to the point of death but God delivered them now you go and do the same you go be those kind of people you go be brave they were heroes you go be a hero but if we're honest with ourselves and if I'm honest with myself I'm not a hero and you're not a hero either if I tell you to go be like Shadrach Meshach and Abednego you might say okay and then you'll go try and you'll fail in your own strength because

I'll bow to safety and I'll bow to comfort and every time I bow down to one of the idols of my heart I earn God's judgment I earn his wrath and so do you because there's already been a hundred occasions when you should have stood but you didn't and there'll probably be a hundred more we've all sinned we've all fallen short of the glory of God but the good news is that God doesn't save heroes he saves sinners the good news is not go be like Shadrach Meshach and Abednego they were heroes and if you go be a hero then God will love you the gospel is simply this that Jesus was our hero for us he already has done what we need to do in order to win the love and the favor of

God God already showed his ultimate commitment to us and sending his son to save us remember Jesus was called Emmanuel God with us and he came to bear the punishment of our sin and so all my idolatry all my comfort worship and all my safety worship and all my kingdom building and all my gold statues in my life all that rebellion where I said God it's not going to be your way it's going to be my way all that rebellion was put on Jesus Christ and he walked into the furnace of God's wrath and he did it alone God showed his commitment to us by abandoning his son in the place of judgment and so we have the promise that God will never leave us or forsake us that he'll be with us in our trials that when we walk through the fire and the water he will be with us but he was not with [36:37] Jesus on the cross like that so God kept Shadrach Meshach and Abednego unburned but he did not keep his own son unburned because Jesus was burned we can rest in what God has done for us and so the fire of God's wrath Jesus was not spared from it it consumed him he quenched God's flaming sword with his own blood so why did Jesus do it well we're not heroes we're not righteous we're kinds of people that run away and he did it to forgive us he did it to open up heaven for the undeserving that's us to rescue those helpless people and that's what we are now some like

I said some of you think that the gospel is be like Shadrach Meshach and Abednego and if you do God will love you be brave and God will save you some of you think that the gospel is go and do likewise and God will love you but the gospel is none of those things the gospel is what one hero Jesus did for his people for people like us!

! may may will forgive us.

His grace has put a new spirit in us. And so that we can stand faithful. We can be like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego because of who God is.

Because He is the kind of God that is strong. And He is the kind of God that has promised you infinite, eternal safety. And He's the kind of God that said, my love is better than life.

[39 : 37] And so He's the kind of God that if we die, it's called gain. To die is to gain. To die is to go and be with Him who's loved me and gave Himself up for me.

And so out of grace, you can stand. And out of grace, God will make you stand. So do you want to know if you are getting the Gospel?

If it's real to you and if it's vital to you and if this is the thing that you're living on and trusting and if Jesus is your all, do you want to know how you can know? It's because you are making these stands at work and at school and in your home because you have seen that Jesus has done it all for me.

He's loved me. He's gave Himself up for me. And so I'm safe in His arms. God is really enough for us.

Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we would ask that You would please send the Holy Spirit this week to make these words real to us that we would see the need.

[40 : 59] The need that we have for the Gospel on Monday morning and Monday afternoon and then Tuesday and Wednesday and every day of the week while we are put into difficult situations because those situations will come.

I pray, Lord, that You would remind us of what Jesus has done for us. remind us of who You are so that we can stand, so that we can be faithful, so that we can say no to this world and no to Satan and no to those people who are over us and authority who would oppress us and that we would stay faithful even when it means suffering.

We would not bend either by terror or by temptation, but we would stand on Your promises Holy Spirit, come and please put a thirst in our own hearts and our souls for Jesus Christ.

I pray, Lord, that we would feed on Him, feed on what He has done and the hero that He is for us. Will You please wow us and dazzle us with Your grace so that we could live obediently for You. It's in Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Amen. Thank you.