

## **Faith In The Furnace**

Turn in your bible to Daniel 3. I want to look at one of the great stories from the Old Testament. We used to call it the story of the three Hebrew children in the fiery furnace – Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Just to give you a quick overview, Jerusalem has been conquered by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. The temple has been destroyed, thousands have been killed and thousands more taken in captivity to Babylon. It will be seventy years before they will be allowed to return to the land of Judah and to rebuild their fallen city.

Nebuchadnezzar brought some of the sharpest young Jewish men into his court. He had them trained in all the wisdom and culture and science of the Babylonian empire and then made them advisors. Daniel was one of those young men as were these three we are focusing on today, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. It's interesting that we know these three fellows by their Babylonian names. Their Hebrew names are, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. Daniel's Babylonian name was Belteshazzar but we know him by his Hebrew name. (It goes to show you, if you write the story, you can call yourself whatever you please.)

As our story opens in chapter 3, King Nebuchadnezzar has a gold statue built and orders everyone to bow down before it when they hear the music playing. Failure to comply will result in your being thrown into a blazing, fiery furnace. These three Jewish fellows knew bowing to any idol would be a sin against God, breaking one of the ten commandments. They refused to bow down and were arrested, interrogated, and thrown into the fiery furnace, however, God had different plans.

I felt drawn to this story and this message for a couple of reasons. First, as Christians we are being called and increasingly pressured to bow down to the gods of culture and political correctness. Pressure will increase to silence the Christian voice, the penalties will become more severe and the temperature of the fiery furnace will likely get hotter in the days ahead. What will we do when we find ourselves in a fiery furnace, a fiery trial? How are we to respond?

Secondly, there are so many finding themselves in a fiery trial right now. You heard the growing list of people battling with cancer right now. Illness. Some are in a fiery furnace of depression, some in a fiery furnace of conflict and strife, financial trouble. How do we respond when we find ourselves under attack from the enemy of our soul? How are we to respond when we are thrown into a fiery furnace? Let's look beginning at verse 12.

Notice especially what the king says in verse 25. **“Look! I see four men walking**

**around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.”**

### **Daniel 3:25**

The first thing we need to do when we are thrown into a fiery furnace: **Keep walking through the fire.** Fiery furnaces are no place to stop! The king saw four men “walking around in the fire”. You have to keep walking. Don’t quit or give up when you find yourself in a fiery furnace, in a place of testing and trial. I see people get discouraged and they stop serving Jesus because they are going through a fiery trial. Don’t give up now! Not in a fiery furnace. Keep moving so you can get out of there! Stay on course.

It’s part of living in this broken world that trials come, sickness comes, trouble comes. It is part of being a Christian and resisting the call to compromise and sin that persecution and ridicule comes. But don’t stop walking with Jesus when you are going through a fiery trial. I’ve got a feeling those three were staying as close to the fourth man in the fire as possible. “Follow him fellows!” Job in his fiery trial said, “My feet have closely followed his steps. I have kept to his way without turning aside.” Job 23:11 Keep walking with Jesus through the fire!

And remember, the important word here is “through.” You are going through a fiery trial. You aren’t going into this fiery furnace to stay. You are going through this trial and somewhere in it, or on the other side of it, or because of it, or perhaps all the above, you will see God’s glory revealed! You’re coming out on the other side changed, proven, tested, complete, victorious. Job said, “When he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.” Job 23:10. One way or another, God is going to be glorified and you are going to experience his victory. If I live, I live with Jesus. If I die, I live with Jesus. Either way, I win. Either way, I’m going through! But keep walking with Jesus.

Notice, these three guys had already made up their mind to keep walking, to keep serving the Lord, regardless of what happened. Remember they told the king, **“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.” Daniel 3:17-18**

I don’t know what the future holds, but I’ve made up my mind, whatever comes, I’m going to keep walking with Jesus. There is no place to stop, no place to quit. Keep walking with Jesus, regardless of the circumstances, regardless of how hot the fire. I’m going through this with Jesus. He will see me through to victory either here or on the other side. Either way, I’m going to keep

walking with him through this fiery furnace!

The second thing to remember in a fiery furnace: **Don't be surprised by the fire!** I said it a moment ago that trials are a part of life. It's what happens when you live in a fallen and broken world. It's what happens when we bear the consequences of sin and mistakes and failures, ours and that of others. The bible says, **“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.” 1 Peter 4:12-13** King James Version says “think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which has come to try you...”

If a trial comes, don't immediately start thinking “Why is God punishing me? What did I do to deserve this? Why me?” We think trouble shouldn't ever come to Christians, to believers. I'll say it again, believers aren't exempt from trouble and trials. It goes with life on the planet. Christians get old and suffer aches and pains. We make mistakes and suffer for it. On top of that, the devil hates us and wants to discourage us, defeat us, throw us into fiery furnaces. We may suffer for the gospel sake. Certainly we make sacrifices and deny ourselves the pleasures of sin and some may view that as a type of suffering for the gospel's sake. The bible says, **“Many are the afflictions of the righteous but the Lord delivers him from them all.” Psalm 34:19** (NIV reads, “A righteous man may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all.”)

That same passage in 1 Peter says, **“If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.” 1 Peter 4:16** We don't have to hide or be ashamed that we have trials. Trials come but our response rather than shock and surprise is trust and confidence! Our God is mighty to deliver. Our God is able. Our God is greater. He delivers us out of all of our afflictions. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego said “the God we serve is able to save us and he will rescue us...!” They were confident and trusting in the Lord's deliverance. But they were also confident in his sustaining grace and power. He will deliver us, but if not in the way we expect, we are still certain he will keep us and sustain us. Regardless of God's purposes in this – even if he chooses not to deliver us from this fiery trial, our resolve is – “we will not serve any other God.” Don't be surprised if trouble comes, but don't stop trusting in the God who is able to deliver us out of every trial and fiery furnace life and the devil may bring our way!

It is one of the paradoxes of the Christian life, that trials come and we have to go through them. Why doesn't he just exempt us from all the trouble? That's another sermon, perhaps.

The Lord said through the prophet Isaiah, **“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.”** Isaiah 43:1-3

We want to argue with God about why we are having to go through storms and flood waters and overflowing rivers. Why do I have to walk through the fire? I don't know but how about focusing on the fact that he is with you and the flames aren't setting you ablaze? How about the fact the floodwaters didn't sweep you away, you didn't drown in the river. God is with you in this trial you are going through. The river is just going to get you to your destination a little quicker than you planned. The water is just going to wash the dirt off and sweep the grime away. The fire isn't going to consume you. Why? Because he said, “when you pass through the waters I will be with you.” The Lord is with us and he said “I am your Savior.”

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are walking around in the fire. What the Lord promised through Isaiah is happening to them. The flames won't set them ablaze. You may be in a fiery furnace today, but you aren't being consumed either. You're still here, glory to God!

Here's the next thing you need to remember if you find yourself in a fiery furnace: **Expect to find freedom in the fire.** Look at this: **The only thing that got burned in the fire was the ropes that had them bound!** They were freer in the fire than they had been all trussed up and standing before the king. The bible says they were “firmly tied,” yet the next thing we hear is King Nebuchadnezzar saying, **“I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed...”**

I said earlier if you keep walking with Jesus and trusting him, you are going to come through the fire proven, mature, stronger, refined with greater faith and confidence. The only thing you are losing in the fire is the stuff that held you back, that kept you shackled and bound, that kept you from being everything God had called you to be. Trials have a way of refining us, burning out the chaff, removing the unnecessary things that weigh us down, trip us up, or hold us back. The last verse of the chapter says after this fiery trial, **“Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.”** Daniel 3:30 The only thing that was burned off of them was anything that held them back!

You need to hear this – what the devil meant for evil God is going to work out for your

good. You thought this trial was going to destroy you and instead, God is going to bring a greater victory to you. He is at work in the fire. Freedom is coming. Healing is coming. Provision is coming. Revelation is coming. Instead of being consumed by the fiery trial, you are about to be ablaze with God's glory and power. You are about to be free of the shackles that wouldn't come off any other way. You are about to learn something about God's power and faithfulness and love you've never known before. Don't stop, don't quit, give thanks to God and keep on walking through the fire!

**Let God get glory through the fire.** Think about this. God trusted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that even if they went through this fiery trial they wouldn't stop trusting Him and serving him. He knew what their testimony would be. He needed someone in the king's court to show the power of God to Nebuchadnezzar.

When God brought them through the fire, look what happened: **"...the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers 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."** Daniel 3:27

Understand the testimony that is happening here. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were part of a conquered people. The king and all of the royal court saw them as inferior in every way and viewed their God as inferior as well since he had allowed the Jews to be defeated and carried off into exile. If the God of the Hebrews was so powerful, why hadn't he protected his people from the Babylonians? The God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had been conquered along with them and then He shows up and delivers them out of the fiery furnace. Unburned, unscathed, not even the smell of fire on them. The only thing that goes up in smoke is the perception of the Babylonians toward the God of Israel. The king says, **"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. 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."** Daniel 3:28-29

You may be going through the fire right now, wondering how in the world God could turn any of this into something good for you. Well, maybe it's not just about you. Think of our heroes

in this story. There would be seventy years of exile for the Jews in Babylon. Seventy years of trials. Seventy years of assimilation and the constant threat of losing their faith and their identity as God's people. Seventy years away from home in Jerusalem, but they could point to this story and say, "But God delivers. God is with us, even in this fiery trial. He hasn't left us after all. He was with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and he will be with us."

Someone is watching right now. They are sniffing around and can't understand why they don't smell smoke on you. They are examining, trying to figure out why you haven't been consumed yet and you have the opportunity to tell them what we all must remember: **The Lord is with me in the fire!** If we go through the fire, the Lord will be with us. The writer of Hebrews reminds us of God's promise, "**Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.**" **Hebrews 13:5**. When we pass through the water, through the river, through the fire, through the tornado, through the tragedies of life, through the loss of a loved one, through chemo and radiation and surgery, through pain and long nights and despair, He is still with us. He is with us in the fire.

Moses told Joshua as he prepared to go into the promised land, "**The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.**" **Deuteronomy 31:8**

I believe that is his word for us today. The Lord is going before us and he will be with us. He will never leave us or forsake us. He is with you in the fire today and he is going to bring you through, shining like pure gold, tested and proven through the fire. His glory is going to be seen in you and through you. You are going to be loosed from shackles that held you captive. You are going to experience God's peace and presence even in the most difficult of times. You'll have greater faith for the journey ahead and greater confidence in God. He has brought you through thus far so don't be afraid. Don't be discouraged. Look around. You aren't alone in this fire. The Lord is with you. He has never left you or forsaken you and he's not about to start now!