

The Story – Shad, Shach and Abednego

Last week we talked about the big story of Hosea. Remember he was warning the people of the northern kingdom of Israel that they were going to be taken into exile if they didn't repent of their sins. They didn't and in 722 the Assyrians conquered Israel and the ten tribes of the north were lost. In 586 the southern kingdom of Judah was conquered by the Babylonians and King Nebuchadnezzar enslaved the people of Judah and took them in exile to Babylon. If you are following the reading guide you have already read part of the book of Daniel and that's what we are looking at today. From among the captives the king had chosen some young Jewish men of excellence to be trained in the culture, literature and language of Babylon in order to serve in the king's palace. Among them were Daniel, and three young men named Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, known to us as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. I thought nicknames would help the first two guys so I went with Shad, Shach and Abednego.

We are talking about big stories in the bible and the book of Daniel is full of big stories! Three guys are thrown into a fiery furnace and God delivers them by a fourth man who walks with them in the fire. Daniel is delivered out of a den of lions. Daniel sees amazing visions of kingdoms that would follow the Babylonian kingdom and details of the last days. Those are big stories, but the really big story is found in these four young Jewish boys, teenagers taken from their home in Jerusalem, in Judah, and brought to the magnificent, yet wicked city of Babylon. They are wined and dined, educated and trained in the literature, science, history and culture of Babylon, yet they remain true to the God of Israel. Everything about their identity as Jews is stripped from them. They are given new names, a new language, a new culture, new traditions and practices, and in spite of that, they refuse to compromise their faith, their beliefs or practices. They resolve not to defile themselves with the sins of a pagan people and culture. That's the big story. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego go to the big city and refuse to compromise!

This book is a powerful example of what it looks like to live faithfully for God in a pagan society. These young men were basically living in the ancient equivalent to the most wicked, secular, sinful, party university in America. That's where these guys were, and yet they faithfully lived for God and refused to compromise their standards or their belief in God and his word, regardless of the threat or the consequences. The book of Daniel also constantly speaks to us of God's sovereign purposes at work, reminding us we can trust him and depend upon him even if we are going through a fiery trial.

I told Pastor Brian I was going to use some thoughts from a sermon he shared with the college group several years ago. He shared his notes with me when we did a study of Daniel on Wednesday nights back in 2014. If you are a Wednesday night note taker then some of this will look familiar. Let's quickly read the story and then we will go back and make some observations. (Read chapter 3).

Our three heroes are being challenged to compromise their standards. Pastor Brian suggested four things that make people compromise their standards. **1) Pleasure** – it will feel better, or at least hurt less. **2) Profit** – it will gain me more money or cost less. **3) Power** - it will gain me control or influence. **4) Practicality** - it will just be quicker and easier. I want to add one more. **5) Peer Pressure** - it will increase my status with my peers. Those are pretty good reasons for compromising. Obviously the opposite of those things, the negative side of them would apply. Pain or the fear of pain rather than pleasure could make me compromise. The fear of losing money rather than gain or profit could cause me to compromise. The fear of losing power and control could cause me to compromise my standards.

In the case of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, the consequence of refusing to compromise was rather extreme. It wasn't just losing their job or their income, it wasn't just that no one would sit with them at lunch. They risked losing their life! They didn't have to wonder about the consequences of refusing to bow. It wasn't a matter of "how bad could it be?" They knew what would happen. Either compromise, bow down and worship this image or obey God's commandments and get thrown into a fiery furnace. Tough choice.

Notice the boys didn't have to wonder what would be the right thing to do, because they knew the word of God. They knew the commandments. **"You shall have no other gods before (or besides) me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them..." Deuteronomy 5:7-8.**

The choice was clear and in some sense it was perhaps easier for them. Worship a false god or die. The dying thing, being burned alive in a furnace, that wouldn't be so easy, but the decision as to whether it was okay to worship an idol or not, that was clear. For most of us, the compromises presented to us don't seem as black and white and they certainly have lower stakes. I doubt any of you are worried about losing your life because your boss is forcing you to bow down and worship a golden statue he made of himself and put in the break room. But all of us

are tempted to compromise, to please ourselves instead of pleasing God, to honor and benefit ourselves rather than honoring and doing things that will benefit God and his kingdom.

Remember those reasons Pastor Brian said people compromise their standards? The truth is, in our lives we are constantly presented with choices where it looks like it would be better for us to go against God's word and the direction of the Holy Spirit. 1)Pleasure. "God wants me to be happy and this will make me happy." And that may be true, but God is more concerned about your spiritual growth and well being, about your soul and your eternal destination than he is about you having a good time. We should be concerned about the same thing. Better to suffer with God's people than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time and then pay for it with your soul. Sin always has consequences.

2)Profit. "It will cost too much if I don't compromise. I can't afford to have integrity when it comes to business." Doing the right thing, obeying God and his word may cost you an account or cost you money or even a job, but remember God promised to supply your needs if you seek first his kingdom and put Him first. You can't afford not to do the right thing!

3)Power. "If I compromise, I might get the promotion and think of the influence I could have and the good I could do from that position!" Nice justification. Our 3 Jewish fellows could have obeyed the king and maybe they would have gotten a promotion where they could help their Jewish brothers and sisters. But then again, how much help will someone provide when they lack character. Quoting Pastor Brian, **"In reality, those tempted by power and influence very rarely are actually thinking of the good that they can do for others."...Brian White.**

4) Practicality. "It just makes more sense to compromise. It's less trouble, it's faster, easier and no one really cares anyway." Someone does care. God cares when we violate his laws and commandments. It's a big deal. Compromise in the end is never convenient or easier.

5) Peer pressure. "What will 'they' think of me?" They can be anybody, from classmates to colleagues. Whose opinion matters most, God's or the girls on the varsity cheer leading squad? God's or your boss, or the client, or your neighbor, or your boyfriend? In the face of eternity, there is only one opinion that matters, that is the Lord himself. And think of that great crowd of witnesses in heaven, those who laid down their life for the gospel, that gave their all. If you are motivated by peer pressure, ask yourself, "What will they think?"

The idea that sinning in this situation is the best alternative, the best option, that is never true. "It won't hurt, just this one time and then I'll fix it later." Yeah, that never happens. The

bible says **“There is a way that seems right to a man but in the end it leads to death.”**

Proverbs 14:12. Sin and moral compromise is never a better idea or a better solution.

Shad, Shach & Abednego are faced with a decision. Do what’s best for themselves or do what is pleasing to God. Do what will save their lives or obey God and get thrown into a fiery furnace. “But God wants us to be happy. He wouldn’t want us to get thrown into a fiery furnace.” What did Jesus say? **“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? Matthew 16:24-26**

These guys could have held on to their lives but they would have lost in the end. They would have lost themselves, lost their relationship with God, lost their way and finally lost their souls. The only way to succeed is to give your whole life, surrender your whole life to the Lord, lose your life for him. It comes down to this: **We have to decide to live for God, regardless of the circumstances and regardless of the consequences!** That’s what Shad, Shach and Abednego decided to do.

Here is the maturity and depth of the decision these 3 young men made. Look at their response 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.” Daniel 3:16-18**

I love the faith and the resolve of Shad, Shach & Abednego. Their faith wasn’t tied to their circumstances or their prospect of success or even to God doing what they wanted him to do. They weren’t trying to negotiate with God. “If you will deliver us, we will serve you forever.” That’s how we pray, isn’t it? But these three were determined to be obedient, regardless. **“God will deliver us, but if he doesn’t and we burn, we still won’t compromise. We won’t bow to your idol. We won’t sell our soul for any price. We aren’t for sale!”**

You hear me say it often, “If you can be bought, the devil will meet your price!” Shad, Shach and Abednego weren’t for sale. They took a stand. They refused to compromise and God delivered them...but not right away! First, they had to be thrown into the fiery furnace.

You know the truth – God never promised we wouldn't have problems. He never said if we had enough faith we wouldn't encounter trials and difficulties. He did promise he would never leave us or forsake us. He did promise that if we seek first his kingdom all the other things would be taken care of. He did promise he would cause all things to work together for the good of those who love him and are surrendered to his purpose. He did promise one day he would wipe away all the tears from our eyes. He promised a lot of things, but he never promised we wouldn't have to bear a cross.

Shad, Shach&Abednego had to carry a cross. Yes, they got delivered, but they got delivered *out* of the fiery furnace, not *from* the fiery furnace. They still had to go through the fire, but God brought them out. Refuse to compromise and the truth is you'll likely go through some fire, but God has promised to be with us through the storm, through the flood, through the fire. And notice what the king said about them after God delivered them. **“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.” Daniel 3:28.** The king was impressed by their willingness to honor their God and live out their faith. People are watching your life and how you face the challenges, the problems you encounter. Remain faithful, obey God, do what's right and watch how God works it out. Trust him like Shad, Shach &Abednego did.

If you are going through a fiery trial, remember, God hasn't lost sight of you. It may feel that way sometimes, but he knows right where you are and exactly what is going on. He knew where SM&A were and he knows where you are. He was in the fire, in the trial with them!

If you are going through a trial, remember, God hasn't given up on you. Maybe you feel like the mess in your life is some kind of punishment for sin. An appropriate question to ask would be, is it? Is there sin in your life? Ask God to show you. If there is, decide now that you want to honor God with your choices and with your life. Ask him to forgive you and he will. He promised he would. Turn away from sin and compromise and live for Jesus. There are consequences to our sin and bad choices, but God hasn't given up on you. Call on him and see.

You're going through a fiery trial. Perhaps God will deliver you miraculously like he did for Shad, Shach &Abednego. Or rather than a miraculous deliverance, God may give you the wisdom to navigate through the trial. He will guide you. He may show you that sin did have something to do with the hard times you found yourself in. The bible says the way of the transgressor is hard, but he is ready to forgive and to show mercy to you. You will discover that

when you stop sinning and stop the compromise, life really does get better.

God may tell you that you are going to have to go through this. You may ask him to deliver you from the trial, the fiery furnace, and he may say “no.” The apostle Paul talked about a messenger of Satan that was sent to torment him. He called it a “thorn in his flesh.” He asked God three times to take it away and God didn’t take it away, but instead, God told him, **“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” 2 Corinthians 12:9.** God’s grace is sufficient for you. One way or another His grace will take you through the trial.

Shad, Shach & Abednego had to go through the fire, but don’t forget what the king saw in the fiery furnace: a fourth man! Bible scholars debate about whether it was an angel or a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus. The king said whoever that fourth man was, he looked like a son of the gods.

SM&A had to go through the fire, but don’t forget they met God and his provision in that fire and when they came out, the only thing they lost were the ropes that had bound them. They were walking around in the fire and not a hair of their head was singed, their robes were not scorched and there was no smell of fire on them. It wasn’t just the king that witnessed it but the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers all saw it. In the end the king said, **“...no other god can save in this way.” Daniel 3:29**

We know that for a fact! There is no other god besides the Lord our God! You may be going through a fiery trial. Your faith is being tested and tried. The enemy is trying to get you to compromise and you are struggling to stand strong. Let Shad, Shach & Abednego’s story encourage you. Know this: it pays to serve the Lord and to obey him. You’ll never regret trusting the Lord and obeying Him. **“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.” Proverbs 3:5-6** Regardless of the circumstances, regardless of the consequences, put your trust in the Lord and don’t compromise!