

Tried by Fire

Daniel 3

This story is probably familiar to most of you who have been going to church for any amount of time. It is the familiar Old Testament story of three Hebrew young men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who were thrown into the fiery furnace. We can experience a personal miracle when the heat is on.

This is one of the most thrilling stories in all of the Bible. It pulsates with drama, and it is a thrilling example of courage under fire and not compromising. We are looking at a story where three Hebrew young men stood in the place of miracles when everyone else was falling down, and they received a miracle when the pressure was on. It's so important for us to understand that we can't conjure up a miracle. You can't change a life. You can't even change yourself without God's power. God can work miracles in our lives and through our church.

King Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had conquered all the known world of that time. He had been reading his own press clippings, and because it had gone to his head, and he decided to build a 90-foot-tall statue of himself. That's confidence right there, and then he wanted everyone to worship the statue of himself because he thought he was a god. He said, "When the music plays, you are all to bow down, and if you don't bow down, I'm going to throw you in a blazing furnace of fire."

The choice was pretty clear cut - bow or burn. So when the music played, a sea of thousands fell like dominoes and bowed, but three young Hebrew men stood up, and they stood out. They took their stand for God, and they told the king that they would stand in awe of God alone, even if it means they would have to stand alone. They faced the most powerful man on the face of the earth at the time, King Nebuchadnezzar, the conqueror of the known world, and just spoke boldly to him. They had taken a stand before. They had lived with conviction before. They had stood up for what was right before, so they stood for what was right even now.

At a young age, these men were taken into captivity, and everything they had was stripped away, but when they got to Babylon, they worked hard. They were noticed by the Babylonians and kept being promoted until they were some of the king's advisors. They probably had nice homes and wonderful families. Just think how easy it would have been for them to just bow a knee because Nebuchadnezzar liked them. He didn't want to throw them into the blazing furnace. He was giving them every chance. Think how easy it would have been for them to just quickly bow down and then go back to their nice homes and their wonderful family and live out the rest of their lives, but they didn't. They chose God's calling over their own comfort.

Every day, you and I are faced with choices where it's God's calling for our life or comfort, and every time you chose comfort over God's calling, you die a little bit each day because you weren't made to live a comfortable life. You were made to live a passionate life, taking risks in faith, being fully alive, believing God for everything that He has for you. When you start making it your number one goal to be comfortable, to be safe, secure, to take out all risks, you die a little bit each day because you weren't made for that. You were made for more than that, and these guys made the choice. They chose God's calling over their own comfort.

1 Corinthians 16:13 says, "*Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.*"

"Act like men" in the Greek is just one word, and the word literally means "be the man." If you're a husband, lead your family spiritually. Lead your family by loving them and putting them before yourself.

This nation, more than anything else, needs men to stand up and be Godly men and to lead their family spiritually.

"King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, ninety feet high and nine feet wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, 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, advisers, 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, 'Nations and peoples of every language, 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 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." Daniel 3:1-7

"I will give you one more chance to bow down and worship the statue I have made when you hear the sound of the musical instruments. But if you refuse, you will be thrown immediately into the blazing furnace. And then what god will be able to rescue you from my power?" Daniel 3:15

1. Who will you stand for?

If you want a personal miracle, you've got to stand for what is right. This is the only time Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are mentioned in all the Scripture. Imagine if they had bowed down like the thousands of others. We would have never known who they were. Their names would have gone into the trash bin of history like the names of all the others who were there that day that bowed down. We'll never know their names, but we have been talking about these three men for thousands of years because of their stand.

Our legacy will be determined by where we stand in the defining moments of our life. Your legacy will be determined by where you stand in those defining moments of your life when the pressure hits. These men served God for the first 20 years of their life, and then they could have just bowed their knee real quickly and served an idol for 10 seconds and then gone back to their nice homes and families and served God for the next 50 years of their lives. If these three young men would have missed that moment, they would have missed a miracle, and we wouldn't be talking about them today. No one would remember them.

Where I stand in the defining moments of my life really define my whole life, and there are usually three or four defining moments in everyone's life. God planned that you would be alive and walking this earth. It's not an accident. What will you stand for?

If you don't stand for something, you'll fall for anything. Most people have no convictions, no foundation. They just blow in the wind. They act one way when they're with one group of people, and they act another way with another group of friends. They have no core convictions, and they wonder why they feel empty on the inside. They wonder why they just get bounced around from problem to problem like they're in a pinball machine. They have no core foundation that they base their life on. In Daniel 3:15, the King gives these men one more chance. The king has them brought before him and says:

There are some things that trouble you about the story. Nebuchadnezzar has built an image that is similar to the one he had a dream about. At the end of the interpretation of his dream, he comes down and bows and says, *"Your God is the one true God."* Daniel 2:27

But something has happened. Somewhere between 16 and 20 years have passed between Daniel chapters 2 and 3. Nebuchadnezzar's zeal and his faith have waned in those years. Why would he build this statue 90 feet high?

He was saying, "You can have your God, but I would like for you to add my God to the list." But God is a jealous God. They knew the Shema – "The Lord our God is one." They were about to face a collision of convictions.

"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.'" Daniel 3:16-18

They don't stop there. They go on to a statement of devotion that takes your breath away. One thing you need to know about these three young men is that they are not people with a superficial faith.

Their lives have not always been easy. Their lives have been exceptionally difficult. They would have prayed a long time ago, when Babylon was rising as a world power and their little country of Israel was threatened, that Nebuchadnezzar would not defeat them, but he did. They would have prayed when Babylon took over and some of the brightest and the best were being exiled that they would not be among those who were exiled, but they were. When they heard one day about this decree where everybody was going to have to fall down in front of an idol, they must have prayed Nebuchadnezzar would repent, that he would come to his senses, but he did not.

They must have prayed that the decree would not end up being enforced, but it was. They must have prayed that because of Daniel's influence with Nebuchadnezzar, the Jews would be excused, but they weren't. Maybe they prayed that when that day came, nobody would notice that they failed to bow, or if people noticed, they would not tell, but people noticed. People told.

Not one of their prayers got answered, at every point, and they were bitterly disappointed.

At every point, the nightmare grew closer to reality. Now they faced their worst fear. They stare their worst enemy in the eye. Now every door of escape has been closed tight. So they testify once more to their faith in the One they serve.

"If we are thrown into the furnace, O king, we want you to know the God we serve is able to save us from it." Daniel 3:17

God is not a mythical king. He is not an abstraction. He is not just an idea. He is not like this statue you yourself have just built out in the desert. He is real. He made everything that is. He stands above time, space, and history. He is making Himself known among the peoples of the earth. He is able to save us from the furnace. He is able to deliver us from your hand.

"The God we serve is able." This is the truth of great power. Therefore, we have options. We do not have to live in fear. We do not have to live in defeat. We do not have to cower. The God we serve is able to reconcile broken marriages. I've seen it happen. The God we serve is able to liberate people from addictions. The God we serve is able to heal damaged bodies. The God we serve is able to forgive the darkest of sins and make somebody into a new creature, and I've seen it all happen. The God we serve is able to provide for your greatest need. The God we serve is able to guide with supernatural wisdom. The God we serve is able to inspire spiritual gifting beyond human ability. The God we serve is able to soften the hardest human heart in the world. Our God is able to answer your deepest prayers, able to fulfill your fondest desires, able to realize your greatest dream.

"Our God is able." You can live with that this week. When you run into a problem, when somebody does not like you, when something is not going your way, when a worry comes into your mind...our God is able.

The reason these three lived in faith, not in fear, is because they lived with belief in their great big God. Their focus is not on the size of the furnace or the power of Nebuchadnezzar. Their focus was on their God. Our God is able.

Our world still has its fiery furnaces. This world still has its ways of trying to put pressure on you. Sometimes it is ridicule and laughter. Do you know what it is to be laughed at? Do you know what it is to be made fun of and to be scorned when you won't go along with the crowd?

Then in verse 18, we read one of the greatest statements of faith ever uttered by any human being. *"But even if He does not..."* Daniel 3:18

They were saying, "Our God can still rescue us, Nebuchadnezzar. The God who drowned Pharaoh's army and fell Jericho's walls and dropped Goliath with a stone, who brought manna in the morning, who gave a pillar of fire to lead His people by night, who spoke worlds into existence...His arms have lost none of their strength. Our God can rescue us still."

“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 3:18 Can we applaud these three men?

How does a human heart get shaped like this? “We want you to know, O king, we will march to our death singing hymns of praise to the only God we will ever serve or love.”

But what about even when He does not? I think of Job who went through intense suffering without relief or explanation and said, *“Though He slay me, yet I will trust Him.”* Job 13:15

Esther decided she would confront a king bent on genocide, even though it could mean her death, and said, *“I will go to the king even though it is against the law. If I perish, I perish.”* Esther 4:13

A lot of us are tempted to pray, “God, if You'll grant this one request, if You give me what I really want, I'll spend the rest of my life serving You. I'll tell everybody about You.” Will you decide to have “even if He does not” faith?

“Even if he does not.” Our God is able to save us and work a miracle, but, even if He doesn't, we're not going to bow. We're standing in the place of miracles, and we're going to leave the results to God, whatever He wants to do. We know our only job is just to obey Him, step out in faith, and stand in the place of miracles. Then God can work the miracle how He wants and when He wants, because that's God's job.” The results in my life are God's job. My job is to obey and stay connected to Him and stand in the place of miracles, and God works miracles how He wants and when He wants. We need that kind of faith.

The question now... *What will you do even if He does not?* Even if God does not bring relief into my life, even if it means facing fear and aloneness, I will not dishonor my God. I will not bend my knee to a relationship I know does not please my Heavenly Father.

It takes faith to believe that God is able to deliver. It takes faith to serve God when He does deliver, but it takes greater faith to serve God when He chooses not to deliver. The question is not a question about the power of God. There is no question in their minds about the power of God. They have already expressed confidence in the power of God. Our God is able! It was not whether or not God could, the question was whether or not God would. Is it in the plan of God? If not! Are you ready for the “if not's”? It's one thing to serve God when everything goes well and God answers prayer. What about those times when things don't go well and our prayers don't get the answers we would like to have?

There is no question about God's power. God is able! Sometimes the question is, “What is God's plan and purpose?” Those Hebrew young men were basically saying that, “God can deliver us out of this furnace. If not, we want you to know that we are still not going to bow down.”

Maybe it involves finances that are going really badly, and you are in debt. Our God is able to provide. Even if He does not... Maybe there is a job that's not turning out the way you want to. Maybe you're looking for a job. Our God is able to make a way. Even if He does not... Maybe your health is turning against you. Our God is able to heal. Even if He does not... Maybe you wrestle with a depression that is so bad some mornings you do not even know if it is worthwhile to get out of bed. Our God is able to bring joy. Our God is able to lift depression. Even if He does not... Even if I have to wrestle with this the rest of my life... Maybe you have a child who is a long, long way from home. Our Father specializes in bringing prodigal sons and prodigal daughters back to Him, in putting families back together. Even if He does not...

Often the truth of our faith is, “When my day goes well, when I get good news, when circumstances go right... I live with joy. I want to serve. I'm motivated to tell other people about God. I'm more generous with my time and my money.” But if I get a little close to the furnace, I begin to bend the knee and change.

We struggle when things don't turn out the way we think they should. We question why an innocent baby dies and murderers go free. These three did not know why things went the way they did. They expressed their absolute

commitment to God. They never made their obedience contingent upon what God would or would not do. They just said, “We are going to trust God no matter how this turns out.”

They said, “God, we don’t know how You are going to do this. We don’t even know what You are going to do, but we trust in God. We believe in God.” They say this to Nebuchadnezzar, and he is deeply moved by their devotion and sets them free and proclaims religious liberty throughout the land. Is that the way the story goes? No. Nebuchadnezzar wasn’t that kind of a guy.

2. Who will you stand with?

These three young men were standing for all those who couldn’t stand or didn’t have the strength, the courage, or the faith to stand, and the amazing thing is, when they stood in the fire, God brought them through, worked the miracle and then the king was so blown away by it that he proclaimed everyone should stand for the one true God. That gave others courage to stand because Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego took their stand. They were standing for others who didn’t have the faith and the courage to stand.

In Ezekiel 22:30 God says, *“I looked for someone who might rebuild the wall of righteousness that guards the land. I searched for someone to stand in the gap in the wall so I wouldn’t have to destroy the land, but I found no one.”* Ezekiel 22:30

God says, “I was looking for someone who was standing up for others and interceding rather than just standing up for themselves and selfishness. All I found were people who were just standing up for themselves.”

If you just stand up for yourself in this life, then what you do in this life will not stand the test of time. What you do is going to be washed away by the tide of time if all you do is focus on yourself and stand up for you and what you want, your needs and desires, and you don’t stand up for anyone else.

Proverbs 31:8 says, *“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.”*

Speak for those who can’t speak for themselves. Stand up for those who can’t stand up for themselves.

Our church makes a big difference because our eyes are not on ourselves. We stand for the poor and powerless. If you stand up for yourself, God doesn’t stand with you. If you stand up for yourself and that’s all you do, God doesn’t stand with you, and what you do won’t stand. But, when you stand for the poor and powerless, what you do stands forever, and God stands with you because He defends the poor and the powerless.

A Christian life is not just a matter of believing. These three guys stood together. They stood with each other no matter what, and when they stood together, Christ stood with them.

“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.” Daniel 3:19

It was a way of saying something is getting maximized to the fullest extent possible. “Heat that furnace up as high as it will go.” You see that phrase every once in a while in ancient literature. It appears in Proverbs a lot. *“Though the righteous fall seven times, they will rise back up.”* Proverbs 24:16

To deliberately burn someone to death is one of the most inhumane forms of execution. It involves treating a human being like an object, like a stick of wood to dispose of. Human beings have been treated that way by authorities who make themselves absolute, and still do to our day.

They’re carried them to the furnace, but they were filled with courage, fear, defiance, and faith...

3. Who Stands With You?

“Suddenly, Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in amazement and exclaimed to his advisers, 'Didn't we tie up three men and throw them into the furnace?' 'Yes, Your Majesty, we certainly did,' they replied. 'Look!' Nebuchadnezzar shouted. 'I see four men, unbound, walking around the fire unharmed! And the fourth looks like a son of the gods.'” Daniel 3:24-25

He threw them in, but they were unharmed. The only thing that happened to them was their ropes were burned off, and some of you are going through the fire right now. If you stand together in the Body of Christ and turn to Christ, He will be with you in the fire, and you'll be unharmed. The only thing that would be burned off are the things that bind you, the hurt and the habits and the hang-ups. When you go through the fire, He says you will not be burned. It will just be those ropes that bind you that will be burned off ... those things that held you back. Sometimes God allows us to go through the fire just to burn those things away, those things that are meaningless in our lives, those things that maybe we're paying too much attention to, but they're not going to last, and they burn away so that God can do a miracle in our lives.

God walks with us through the times when the fire is turned up and the heat is on. When we are going through pressures and problems, when we walk through the fire, God, You walk through it with us. You want to burn off the ropes that bind us in the fire, the hurts and hang-ups. You want to protect us, and then You want to promote us and lift us up, so that you can use us to work miracles in the lives of others around us.

Who do you think that fourth Man was who can appear from nowhere, who can cheat death, who looks in appearance like a son of the gods? The furnace, which looked like the end of their lives, turns out to be the greatest thing they ever experienced because they met God there. They were hoping to get delivered from the furnace, but God decided to deliver them *in* the furnace.

God is able to bring that wayward son or daughter back home. God is able to heal. God is able to give you the job you need. God is able to work mightily in that difficulty you have gotten yourself into. God is able!

This is the truth that will change your life. God said to them what He sometimes says to people still all around our world, “I will meet you in the furnace...” In the place that looks frightening, dangerous, and painful because it is frightening, dangerous, and painful, it turns out to be where Jesus is.

It turns out to be the adventure of a lifetime. I wonder what the rest of their lives were like for those 3 young men. We don't know. This is our last view of them. They are never mentioned again in the Bible. I wonder as they went through life if they ever thought about how easily they might have missed this adventure. I wonder, if they lived to be old men, would they get together and talk about those moments that only they knew? Did they think about how one word spoken in fear, one knee bent to the wrong god, and they would have missed the adventure of their lives? They would have missed the fourth Man in the furnace.

The fourth Man in the furnace was Jesus because He knows about the furnace. This is what is amazing about our God. Jesus prayed in the Garden that His Father would spare Him the suffering of the cross, of being executed by authorities who wanted to make sure He did not disrupt their empire...the Roman Empire, the Babylon of that day. He prayed He would be spared the pain of carrying our sin on Himself. I cannot even conceive that pain. Then Jesus prayed, “Father, I want to be spared this, but even if I am not... Let this cup pass from Me, but even if it does not... Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours be done.”

It was the Son of God in there in the fire. Jesus Christ will be in there with you, and He'll walk through it with you. Jesus Christ is in every book of the Bible. Jesus Christ is from Genesis to Revelation.

In Genesis, He is the Light of the World, the Creator of all things; in Exodus, He's the Passover Lamb that delivers His children; in Leviticus, He is the High Priest that bridges the gap between God and man; in Numbers, He is the Cloud and the Fire that leads the people through the dessert; in Deuteronomy, He is the Prevailing Prophet; in Joshua, He's the Captain of our Salvation; in Judges, He's the Great Judge of the Living and the Dead; in Ruth, He's the Kinsman Redeemer that redeems the lost and the lonely; in I and II Samuel, He's the Voice of Truth in the middle of

the night; in I and II Kings, He is the One True King; in I and II Chronicles, He's the Holy One; in Ezra, He's the Faithful One; in Nehemiah, He's the Rebuilder of Broken Walls; in Esther, He's the Rescuer in the time of need; in Job, He's the Restorer of all things, the Maker of all things new; in Psalms, He is the great Shepherd; in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, He is the Wisdom of God; in the Song of Solomon, He's the Banner of unconditional love that is over us; in Isaiah, He is the Suffering Servant; in Jeremiah and Lamentations, He is the God whose heart breaks for us; in Ezekiel, He's the Resurrection and the Life to dry bones; in Daniel, He's the Son of Man coming in the clouds; in Hosea, He's the Bridegroom who never stops loving; in Joel, He's the Salvation for all; in Amos, He's the Burden Bearer and the Load Lifter; in Obadiah, He's the Mighty Savior; in Jonah, He's the God of the Second Chance; in Micah, He's the Messenger of Good News; in Nahum, the Restorer of Justice; in Habakkuk, the Interceder for the Broken; in Zephaniah, He is Strength for the weak and the helpless; in Haggai, He's the Cleansing Fountain; in Zechariah, He's the Pierced Son of God; in Malachi, the Son of Righteousness, in Matthew, He's the Messiah and the Friend of Sinners; in Mark, He's the Miracle Worker; in Luke, He's the Son of Man; in John, He's the Son of God; in Acts, He's the Power of God; in Romans, He's the Gift of Salvation; in I and II Corinthians, He's the Last Adam who reverses all wrongs; in Galatians, He is all Freedom; in Ephesians, He is the Cornerstone that the builders rejected, but He is now the Chief Cornerstone on which all life is built; in Philippians, He's the Name Above All Names who meets our every need; in Colossians, He's the Fullness of God, the Hope of Glory; in I and II Thessalonians, He's the Peace of God; in I and II Timothy, He's the Great Mediator between God and man; in Titus, He's our Blessed Hope; in Philemon, He's the Friend that sticks closer than any brother; in Hebrews, He's the Blood that washes away all sin; in James, He is the Great Physician; in I and II Peter, He is the Great Shepherd; in I, II and III John, He is Everlasting Love; in Jude, He is the God who saves us; and of course in Revelation, He is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, He is the First and the Last, He is the Bright and Morning Star, He's the Lion of Judah, He's the Returning King of Kings and Lord of Lords. From Genesis to Revelation, He is Jesus Christ, our Hope. There is a scarlet thread, I hope you know, there is a scarlet thread that runs from Genesis to Revelation, and it is Jesus Christ. It's the story of redemption. It's the story of God's love.

“Then Nebuchadnezzar said, 'Praise to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! He sent his angels to rescue his servants who trusted in him. They defied the king's command and were willing to die rather than serve or worship any god except their own God.’” Daniel 3:28

Nebuchadnezzar pulls them out of the furnace and said, “They've got the one true God, and I'm not God.” Then he promoted them to even higher position in the kingdom. When God brings you through the fire, He always promotes you. He always lifts you up, and He lifts you up so that you can lift others up. He blesses you to be a blessing. God wants you to be effective, and God wants you to be productive. It's not your job to produce the fruit in your life. Your job is to stay connected to Him, keep taking steps of obedience, and stay in the place of miracles. You can't work a miracle. We're ordinary, imperfect people, but He is a miracle-working, extraordinary God!

Sometimes God delivers people *from* the furnace.

Sometimes God delivers people *in* the furnace. I wonder where you are, what your furnace looks like.

For some of you, there is a problem, there is a situation, there is a challenge. You've been worrying about it. You've been trying to handle it on your own. It's been a nagging fear.

It is often in our hottest trials that we are most conscious of God's presence.

You may be crying out to God, “This is too hard for me. This is too heavy. I don't know if I can handle this.” The Father is holding out His arms saying, “I know, I know. You come to Me. You run to Me. I cannot promise every outcome the way you want, but I will walk with you even through the furnace. I will be Your Father, and you will find more in Me than you ever need. You come.”

Come to the God who knows the situation, the difficulty, the fear, the challenges you are facing right now. You will find He is able. We need His power and His deliverance to be released in our lives. There are brothers and sisters on the other side of the world who are threatened with arrests or imprisonment, or worse, for just doing what we're doing right here.

