

Daniel 3:24-25

²⁴ Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counselors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king.

²⁵ He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.

WHEN YOU CAN'T SEE HIM

The greatest stories of deliverance in the Bible are all stories that are very familiar to us because we have heard them our whole lives.

Stories like David and Goliath,
Daniel in the Lion's Den,
Israel at the Red Sea,
and the three Hebrew Children,
are forever implanted upon our memories.

We've heard them a hundred times
and the greatest truths in them are self-evident to us.

We serve a God who delivers his people,
who makes a way when there seems to be no way.

We've learned through those stories that
If you stand fast in your faith,
put your trust fully in him,
and refuse to back down from his promise,
he will do for you what you cannot do for yourself.

As a preacher, I haven't preached about those stories, mainly because they are so familiar to us all.

However, not too long ago, while reading my Bible, I saw something in one of those stories that I had never seen before.

So, if you will bear with me for a moment, I want you to take a journey back to Sunday School with me and let's explore together, for just a few moments, the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

Now, most of us would say that this story starts when Nebuchadnezzar decides to build a towering image of gold and demand that everyone worship it. However, that's not really where the story starts.

The story really starts back in Daniel chapter 2,
about 10 years earlier,
when the King had a dream
that none of his wise men could interpret for him.

As a matter of fact, Nebuchadnezzar, first asked his wisemen
to tell him the dream, rather than interpret it
and when they couldn't tell him what he dreamed,
he gave the order to kill all the wise men
in the whole kingdom.

The problem with that is that
Daniel had a reputation as a wise man.
So, when they sought him out,
to put him to death,
he said “hold on, slow down just a minute.”

Tell the king that I've requested
a little time to pray about this,
so that I might interpret the dream.
And, indeed, God revealed
both the dream and the interpretation to Daniel.

In his dream, Nebuchadnezzar had seen a figure of man,
a giant statue, as it were,
but it was composed of different precious metals.

The figure's head was made of gold,
and the breast and arms were made of silver,
the middle portion of bronze,
the legs of iron,
and the feet and toes of iron mixed with clay.

Daniel told the king that the image represented
different kingdoms that would rise and fall.
The golden head was Babylon,
that was his kingdom,
it represented the height of glory and achievement.
The silver would represent a less glorious,
but stronger kingdom,
which history revealed as the Medes and Persians.

That kingdom would yield to one
that was still less glorious but even stronger,
the kingdom of bronze,
which history reveals as the Greeks.
Which would give way to the strongest,
yet most corrupt of them all,
the kingdom of iron,
which would be manifest in the Roman empire.

At the end of the dream,
this massive statue was destroyed by a rock,
which represented Jesus Christ.

That rock crushed the statue
then grew until it covered the whole earth,
representing the kingdom of God.

Here's the thing, Nebuchadnezzar was probably flattered
to be the kingdom of gold
that sits at the pinnacle
of all the kingdoms of men
in terms of glory and riches,

but it was also somewhat discomfoting to him
to be told that his kingdom would one day fall
and that others would rise in its place.

As a matter of fact, over time,
his wicked heart rebelled against the word of God
and he became more and more determined
that his kingdom would never fall,
that Babylon would never yield to another kingdom.

This was the genesis for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's story.
The King decided to defy the word of God
and he built his own image,
an image that represented his will for the future,
an image that was entirely constructed of gold.

It was a sight to see.
Nebuchadnezzar's statue stood some 9 stories tall.
It towered over everything around it.
It was huge.
And when it was finished,
he demanded that everyone
under the far-flung influence of the Babylonian empire,
come and worship the statue.

So they came, from every tongue, nation, and race to the plain of Dura.

And when the music played,
they bent their knees in allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar
and his defiance of God.

Everyone bowed down
except those three Hebrew boys.

Now here's the thing, the crowd was so massive,
that it was not initially apparent to the king
that the Hebrew boys were not bowing with everyone else.
But there were certain Chaldean Astrologers
who went out of their way to report to the king
that there were three Hebrew boys that had refused to bow.

So the king, in his anger,
had them brought to him.
And he said, I want to see this for myself.
They are going to play the music again
and anyone who doesn't bow down
to this idol I have built,
will be thrown into a fiery furnace.

Now, this is the defining moment in the story.
It was one thing to defy the king
and do what was right,
when he's not looking.
But it's a whole other thing
to stand right there in front of him,
right next to that fiery furnace,
and still say no.

I mean, after all, it was just a stupid statue,
built by an ignorant king.
Who would ever remember if they gave in?
In fact, who would care if they gave in?

After all, they could simply say
They were standing up on the inside,
Even if they bowed down on the outside.
Nobody, and I mean nobody would blame them.

But those three Hebrew children
had one thing settled in their heart,
It was a commandment of old,
taught to them by their mommas,
when they were just little children,
and they simply refused to back down from it.
It was a part of their identity.

They said We Worship the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
There is no other God beside him
and we will not bend our knees to any graven image,
We Will not give our worship
or our allegiance to any other thing.

So these three Hebrews defied the king.

You know the story well, but let me read it from scripture:

Daniel 3:13-18

¹³ Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Then they brought these men before the king. ¹⁴ Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up?

¹⁵ Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. ¹⁷ If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. ¹⁸ But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

This outraged the king, so he commanded that the furnaces be made seven times hotter than they normally were.

And he called the strongest men in his army to come and bind these three defiant Hebrews hand and foot and to cast them into the fiery furnace.

You've heard the story, how that the fire was so hot
that it killed the men who were just doing the throwing.
But then something miraculous happened.
Something that only the Lord could do.

We read it in our bibles...
The King was astonished.
He got up from where he was sitting
so that he could see better.

What he expected to see
was the end of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego...
but that's not what he saw at all.
What he saw, instead, was 4 men in the fire,
free from their bonds
and not being touched by the flames.
They were walking around in the fire,
Unhurt and unbothered.

Now here's the thing
that I never saw before in this story,
until just recently.

**The Bible never says
that the 3 Hebrew children saw the 4th man in the fire,
it only says that the king saw him.**

As a matter of fact, the King asks his advisors,
didn't we throw three men into the fire?
and you would think that if they saw
the same thing the king saw,
they would have acknowledged it in their answer,
but instead they simply confirmed the fact
that there were only 3
that were thrown into the fire.

It is the king who says, “I see four men
loose, walking in the midst of the fire;
and they are not hurt,
and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.”

They were thrown into the fiery furnace, but
they didn't burn, they didn't bow, they didn't break.
Why? Because they weren't alone. They weren't alone!
In the midst of the flames,
there was a fourth man,
and that man was like the Son of God!

So often we tell this story from the Kings perspective,
because that's the way it is presented to us in scripture.
But I want you to take a moment, this afternoon
and see it from the perspective
of Shadrach, Meshack and Abednego.

Here they are, being obedient to the word of God,
not backing down from their faith
and refusing to bow.

They believe, whole-hearted, in the deliverance of God.
They have already told the king,
God can deliver us from the fiery furnace,
but if he doesn't,
he can and will deliver us from you!

In other words, if He doesn't spare us from the fire,
our deaths in the fire
will be a form of escape from you.
Either way, live or die, we win!

But, then their faith is put to the test,
they are cast into the fire.
And, in that moment, when they fully expect to die,
instead they are alive.
The bonds that held them are gone,
but that's the only thing
that the fire has done to them.
In amazement, they are walking around in the fire,
but not being burned.

The miracle for the 3 Hebrew Children
is that God did honor their faith
and he did deliver them,
but not in the way they thought he would.

**He didn't deliver them FROM the fiery furnace...
Instead, he delivered them IN the fiery furnace!**

They faced a test of faith.

A test of faith that's hotter than hot,

A test of faith that is fiercer than fierce.

But they didn't waver, and they didn't falter.

They stood strong, they stood firm! Yes, they stood strong, they stood firm!

When they stood before the king
and talked about the deliverance of God,
They saw two possible outcomes.

One was where they somehow avoided the fire
and one where the fire took their lives
but their faith never wavered.

This third option,
the one where they went into the fire
but were not killed by it,
was not even in the realm of possibility, in their mind.
Yet, here they are... in the fire,
but not being consumed by the fire.

As I look around me at the situation, we find ourselves in,
I am convinced that we have a lot in common
with those three Hebrew children this morning.

Let me be completely honest with you,
I don't think the 3 Hebrew Children
ever saw the 4th man in the fire.
They were walking by faith,
they were trusting in God,
and God was working a miracle of deliverance for them,
but their faith was not dependent
on what they saw with their eyes.
In fact, I believe that they were praising God in the fire.
I believe that they were thanking him for his deliverance.

Have you ever considered
that the manifestation that Nebuchadnezzar saw
may well have been the result of their worship?
The scripture is plain, and I know it is a New Testament word,
but I believe it is a timeless truth,
where 2 or 3 are gathered together in my name,
there will I be in the midst of them!

Listen to me, no matter what is going on in your life,
keep walking by faith,
keep trusting in the Lord
and keep worshipping him!

Church, when you're in the furnace,
when you're in the fire, remember this:
You are not alone! You are not alone!
Just like the three Hebrew boys, God is with you.
He's in the midst of the fire with you.
He's walking with you, He's talking with you,
He's comforting you, and He's protecting you!

Because he's with you,
in the midst of your fiery furnace,
even when you cannot see him!
In fact, if I learn anything from the 3 Hebrew Children,
**it is the fact that sometimes God is going to put us in the fire
so that someone else can see him there with us.**

It may be hard, right now, to see him.
You may look around
and feel like you are all alone in your situation.
But let me encourage you, today,
to keep your head up
and trust in the knowledge
that he has never abandoned you,
that you are not in this thing alone.

Even when you can't see him,
He's working a miracle of deliverance.

It was the king who called them forth from the fire,
in response to what he saw there.
God put himself on display through their lives.

I just believe that we are where we are
because God has a greater purpose.
I believe that He wants to put himself on display in your life...
Even when you can't see him.
If you will trust him,
He's working all things together for good.

Always remember:

Just because you can't see him in your situation,

Just because you can't see him in your troubles,

Just because you can't see him in your trials,

Doesn't mean that others can't see him in your life!

And, that, my friend, may very well be the reason
why you are where you are!

Let me encourage you today to worship him,
in the midst of your fire.

Let me encourage you to worship Him in your situation.

Let me encourage you to worship Him in your troubles.

And Let me encourage you to worship Him in your trials.

Altar Call

As we come to a close in a few minutes, let's remember this story of the three Hebrew boys, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Their faith was tested in the fiery furnace, yet they did not bow to the golden image. They stood firm in their belief in God, and He delivered them from the flames.

I pray that their story inspires us to remain steadfast in our faith, no matter the trials we face. Let us carry their courage and conviction in our hearts as we step out into the world, trusting that God is with us in every situation, just as He was with the three Hebrew boys.

You see, the experiences of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace can be seen as a metaphor for the trials we face in our own lives. Just as they were tested by fire, we too face challenges and difficulties that test our faith and resolve.

Their story teaches us about the power of faith and the importance of standing up for what we believe in, even when faced with immense pressure to conform or give in. In our lives, we may encounter situations where our beliefs or values are challenged. It could be in the form of peer pressure, societal expectations, or personal trials.

The courage and steadfastness of these three Hebrew boys inspire us to remain firm in our convictions and trust in God's deliverance, even when the odds seem against us. Their story reminds us that even in the midst of the fire, we are not alone. God is with us, and He has the power to deliver us.

So, as we go about our daily lives, let's carry with us the lessons from their story - the courage to stand up for what we believe in, the faith to trust in God's deliverance, and the assurance that we are never alone in our trials. These timeless lessons from the three Hebrew boys are as relevant today as they were thousands of years ago.

I invite you to reflect on the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, the three Hebrew boys who stood firm in their faith, even in the face of a fiery furnace. They did not bow to the golden image, they did not waver in their belief in God, and He delivered them from the flames.

Today, I invite you to come to Christ, just as these three boys did. Like them, we too face our own fiery furnaces - trials, tribulations, and challenges that test our faith. But remember, just as God was with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the furnace, He is with us in our trials.

If you feel the heat of the furnace, if you are facing trials that seem insurmountable, I invite you to come to Christ. He is our deliverer, our refuge, and our strength. He is waiting with open arms to welcome you, to comfort you, and to guide you through the fires of life.

Right now, I invite you wherever you are to pray. Come to Christ. Let Him be your deliverer, just as He was for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Remember, no matter how hot the fire, God is with us, and through Him, we will not be burned.