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**Introduction:**

Life and death. Decisions and choices. Faith under fire, literally, but faith triumphs fear as the three Hebrew men refuse, with everything in them, to bow before anything and anyone in worship other than God Almighty.

How far will your faith take you? How much are you willing to endure to maintain your true belief in God? God’s promise in Romans is there is nothing that will separate us from His love (Romans 8:38-39). Is there anything that we will allow to separate our true worship of Him?
True faith takes tenacity. “I will hold on no matter the cost!” It takes boldness, courage under fire, facing fear in the face and refusing to back down.

In having a bold faith no one said that fear wasn’t present but it’s what the three Hebrew men and countless others have chosen to do with it. They chose to resolutely focus more on the solidness of what they believe then what might be.

May this week’s lesson inspire us to courageously hold on to our faith even in the flames of adversity.

Daniel 3:19 “Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated.”

Anger, especially unbridled and “full of fury,” can do irreparable damage. And, “Nebuchadnezzar’s” smokestack was lit, and he was beyond furious.

It goes to show you just how quickly one can move from a place of favor and admiration to becoming a target of persecution in the eyes of man, especially when culture and beliefs collide, leading up to a cataclysmic event.

In last week’s lesson, Daniel and his friends named in our current lesson by their Babylonian given names of “Shadrach,
Meshach, and Abednego,” impressed the king with their wisdom and understanding, considering them to be ten times better than all others in the realm.

In this week’s lesson, Nebuchadnezzar is neither impressed, open, or amused at the stand these men are taking against his royal edict which stated, “At what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the golden image,” (Daniel 3:5) which he had erected “in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon,” (Daniel 3:1). Anyone who refused to bow to this ninety-foot object of his own affection; any who would dare disobey the decree would suffer the immediate consequences of their actions. They, at “the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace,” (Daniel 3:6).

That time had come, and the music rang out heralding for all to obey the king’s command to worship this false image he set up. Person after person “fell down and worshipped the golden image,” (Daniel 3:7).

But, there were some who refused to bow. They stood erect in their faith of God when everyone else around them doubled over because of a false deity. And, soon, this act of rebellion in his eyes was brought to the king’s attention (Daniel 3:8-12). How shocked he must’ve been to find out that it was men from
the captives who had obtained special privilege and been employed in the king’s service (Daniel 1:19-20; 3:12)?

Perhaps this was the reason he offered them another chance to “worship the image,” (Daniel 3:15). But note, while the second chance was given, the conditions were not changed. If they refused the king’s order again, most assuredly they would face the fury of the king and the furnace.

Their answer showed where their faith and allegiance lie: “O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter,” (Daniel 3:16), which means they were so firm in their stand they didn’t feel the need to answer. Nebuchadnezzar may mock the God they believe in but they know that He is able to deliver them (Daniel 3:17). But, and here’s the kicker, they said, “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,” (Daniel 3:18).

“We will not,” means they are determined and unshakeable in their faith and refuse to sin again God regardless of the price they had to pay. Jesus taught us in the New Testament to count up the cost (Luke 14:25-34) because the road of faith is not always easy. There will be sacrifices that have to be made along the way and some days will be tougher than others.

Nebuchadnezzar was intent on making that price high indeed. At the hearing of their answer, “his visage was changed
against” them. He not only was the face of rage, but his whole face showed it as well. Nebuchadnezzar’s whole countenance changed right before their eyes and those around could most likely see the evil and anger he held on the inside, rise to the surface.

His actions verified what his face was reading. Before tossing these faithful men into the flames, Nebuchadnezzar “commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated.” He was intent on increasing the pain he was ready to expose them to. He wanted the flames to burn as hot as his own anger toward them.

Daniel 3:20-23 “And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flames of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.”
Who were these “mighty men”? Nameless (to us), strong men of the court and “army;” the best of the best who could get the job done without hesitation or doubt. Nebuchadnezzar wanted this done and over with, so he chose the elite of his squad to eradicate these rebels who refused to bow. Therefore, with the strongest force he could muster through his men, his commands were followed. As they went about the task of preparing these men for execution, little did they know that day, their lives would end in the process.

They had the job to “cast them into the burning fiery furnace,” and they would, with clothes and all. Everything on the backs of “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego” would go into the flames with them, their “coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments” – but, unbeknownst to the men whose job it was to carry out this execution, those very flames, and the heat from those flames, would kill them that day.

There’s an old adage that says, “Haste makes waste,” and lives were wasted that day to the urgency of the king’s command. The foolish pride of the king didn’t take a breath in during his rampage of anger or else he may have surmised with flames so high and hot it would not be safe for his own men to approach the furnace. His intent was to only kill Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego but “the flame of the fire slew those men” too. Their job cost their life.
As for those whom the flames were made for, those three “fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.” The fact that they fell down into it gives us a sense of the enormity of not only the height of it but with a vessel so large and being superheated the way it was, the intensity of the heat was unreal and able to lick up life in a matter of seconds.

Daniel 3:24-25 “Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. 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.”

Let’s recap a bit. When they fell down in the fire they were bound and helpless. Let’s really take into consideration what that meant. Being bound left them at the mercy of the king, of which he showed none. Being physically restrained meant there was absolutely nothing they could do about their situation. They couldn’t fight back, and they couldn’t run.

But, and here’s the part I like, their, nor our situation never depends on our own strength, ingenuity, or ability to bring the crisis under control.

Being bound and tossed into the flames of affliction may limit us, but it does not get in God’s way at all. At any given
moment, when and if He chooses, God will simply step in the flames with you. The king may have tied down Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego’s hands but there is nothing he could do about the hand of God getting involved. In other words, you are never alone in the fire.

This is what blew the king’s mind. This is why the “king was astonished.” He knew the order he had given, and he knew what should’ve happened, but the results he was seeing was just not adding up, and he was amazed beyond belief.

He questioned, as if not believing what he was seeing, “Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?” The condition of the men was 1) there were initially three of them; 2) they were bound up tight; 3) they went into the fire, so they should be dead! But, as we are soon to find out, they are not.

His “counsellors” confirmed that everything he was saying was “true.”

Nebuchadnezzar, surprised and simply astounded, pointed out that what he was now seeing was not just different than what he expected, but something miraculously divine has taken place.

He said, “Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt.” Suddenly, the three men turned to four, and he knew they were not in the fire alone. Not only
were they not alone but all signs of them being bound were gone, for now, they are “loose.” They were literally experiencing freedom in the fire and that freedom gave them room for “walking” around with no sign of “hurt” on their person.

Wow! There are so many analogies I could glean from this, but I will keep it at this: “When God is present in the fire with you, you can be loosed and walking with no hurt!” God is a deliverer! And, rest assured, when He does it, He does it right. God will astonish those who try to harm His people with the miraculous freedom only He can give. Throughout the Bible, God specializes in setting His people free. “Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty,” (2 Corinthians 3:17).

Then, he switches his focus to the “fourth” man in the flames. Nebuchadnezzar described him as the “Son of God.” This is very important because many believe this to be a visit from Jesus Christ before He was born. Others leave the rendering as just an angel because of the wording given in verse 28. Since we are not given exact details on what he saw that made those words come out of his mouth, we can honestly say no matter what it was about the fourth man in the flames, the sight before Nebuchadnezzar was nothing short of a heavenly inspired visitation.
Daniel 3:26-27 “Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, and spake, and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, ye servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, came forth of the midst of the fire. And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king's counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them.”

“Ye servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither.” With the furnace being built the way it was it was not only easy for Nebuchadnezzar to witness what was going on inside of it, but he was able to call the men out of it. And, when he did, he recognized the fallacy of his earlier order and called them as they are: “servants of the most high God.”

Remember, these men didn’t bow just because they were being difficult or wanted to start some sort of revolution. They didn’t bow because of God. The same God who said thou shalt have no other gods before me or worship graven images (Exodus 20:3-5). He is the same God whose voice thunders from heaven (2 Samuel 22:14). The same God, whom when enemies rage, He can rise against them (Psalm 7:6). The same God, whom from creation to the end of the world and beyond will
still be God, from everlasting to everlasting (Psalm 90:2). He is, “the most high God” (compare Daniel 4:2-3). They were thrown into the fire because of their faith in God, and now they were called out because of that same faith.

And when they came out all those in attendance, “the princes, governors, and captains, and the king’s counsellors,” saw something wonderful that should have inspired Godly fear deep in their souls. When the men were come forth the saw that the “fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them.” No parts of the fire or the furnace experience had any effect on them whatsoever! Amazing! The only effect it may have had on them, which these leaders wouldn’t be able to see, was to increase their faith all the more.

“The fire had no power.” The fire should have killed them. The fire should have burned every part of their being to ash with flames so high. The fire should have disintegrated everything about these men and there shouldn’t have been even anything left over to collect; but, it was not given the power or the ability to do so. I must wonder, what did it look like for these men as they were standing in the flames and looking out without feeling the heat, just the safety of God covering them through it all? Wonderful! Fire eats up and
ravages things every day but when God is the midst, it has no power!

Does everybody who takes a bold stand for their faith escape completely unscathed like these men did? No, and there’s no need to sugar coat it. Real people throughout history, and even in our day, pay the ultimate price for what they believe. Every day someone somewhere has to make the decision to stand or bow and face the repercussions of those actions. Escaping troubles and the flames are not promised to us. Jesus said, “In the world ye shall have tribulation...” (John 16:33a) because if we stand, there will be those who want us to fall because of our faith. But, He also said, “But be of good cheer; I have overcome the world,” (John 16:33b). Because He overcame, when we stand, the flames that touch us on this side will have no effect on our eternal reward (compare Revelation 3:21).

What these leaders witnessed that day was a true miracle from God. Here it is thousands of years later and I wonder if it touched one of those hearts to believe with the same faith? One can only imagine.

Daniel 3:28 “Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies,
that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God.”

What a turn of events?! Nebuchadnezzar wanted to kill the men who stood for this God, and now he himself praises Him: “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.” There will come a time when all will not only praise Him, but “Every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God,” (Romans 14:11; compare Isaiah 45:23; 66:23), no matter who they are, king or not. Those who choose not to will have their own flames to face (see Isaiah 45:24; Matthew 13:42, 50).

He acknowledged that through “his angel” He had “delivered his servants that trusted in him” (compare Psalm34:7). God had supernaturally intervened for the cause of His people, of this, Nebuchadnezzar was sure of. They refused the “king’s word” and “yielded their bodies” to follow wholeheartedly after the will of God only and God protected them for the stand they took because they were willing to suffer to maintain their true faith in Him. They held on to their belief and would not “serve nor worship any god, except their own God.”

The Bible tells us, “For thou art great, and doest wondrous things: thou art God alone,” (Psalm 86:10) and this remained the three Hebrew men’s praise and platform of faith.

Considering all they were facing, that took boldness. It was Spurgeon who said, “Courage we shall need, and for the
exercise of it we have as much reason as necessary, if we are soldiers of King Jesus,” (Quote Source: OChristian.com). Standing for Him, we need this courage of a bold faith.

**Conclusion:**

May we each have a bold faith and keep on standing for what we believe. “Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand,” (Ephesians 6:13). And, stand anyhow.