

FOURTH MAN IN THE FIRE

DATE: SUNDAY, 28TH OF JUNE 2020 | SERIES: DANIEL - PART 3

DANIEL 3:16-29

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, "King 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 deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

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 and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?"

They replied, "Certainly, Your Majesty."

He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."

Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!"

So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, and 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.

Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "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."

START TALKING

1. What stood out to you from Sunday's message?
2. What's your favourite thing to cook over a fire?

START THINKING

1. Suppose the story read that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego died instantly in the fiery furnace. Would this outcome negatively impact your view of God's sovereignty? Would you still view this as a great story of faith even if they died?
2. Convictions often take time to form. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego showed strong convictions regarding the nature of God and His trustworthiness, even when faced with incredible suffering. List one or two of your convictions concerning God that you have embraced, acted on and are willing to suffer for. How might these convictions impact your choices? What might shake these convictions? What might fortify them?

START SHARING

1. God didn't rescue Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego before they were thrown into the furnace; they were rescued in the furnace. Can you recall a situation in your life you wanted God to intervene, but He allowed you to go through it anyway? How did your faith grow through that time?
1. Are there areas in your life that you struggle with living in comfort rather than living for Christ? Name one change you can make this week to move toward worshipping God instead of remaining comfortable.
1. Faith means obeying God regardless of our fears (Daniel 3:12). Though we may not have a king insisting that we bow down to a massive golden

image, we do have challenges to our faith. Discuss some fears that challenge your faith.

START PRAYING

Is anyone currently feeling like they're in a fiery furnace? How can we pray for you?

START DOING

In this series, we have looked at Daniel chapters 1, 2, & 3. Next week we're looking at Daniel 6. Set yourself a plan to read the chapters of Daniel that we haven't covered, and then follow that reading plan.

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SUMMARY

OF SUNDAY'S MESSAGE

This week, Iain shared a message from Daniel chapter 3 in the third part of our Daniels series. It's a story filled with courage and great acts of faith, and God's miraculous power and promise to deliver His followers.

The story is set about 2,600 years ago (approximately 587BC). The Israelites had been defeated by the Babylonians under the rule of king Nebuchadnezzar (who at this point was the most powerful king in the world). They had been taken as exiles into Babylon. Among the exiles were four Hebrew teenagers: Daniel, and his three friends who we know as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Right from the outset these four stood out above the rest and remained firm in their convictions and beliefs - even to the point of politely refusing the royal food and drink given to them (Daniel chapter 1).

In chapter 2, we read about how God helped Daniel to interpret the King's incredible dream. Although Nebuchadnezzar had recognized the God of Daniel, as being the greatest of all gods, we read in chapter 3 about a giant statue. The statue, which the king Nebuchadnezzar arrogantly made, represented himself as an expression of his greatness and glory and reflected the dream where he was the head of gold. Even though he recognized the One True God, he still believed in the false gods of Babylon. Now that this golden image is erected, Nebuchadnezzar sends for all the dignitaries in the country to come to the dedication of the false god. Then the herald loudly proclaimed, *"Nations and peoples of every language, this is what you are commanded to do: As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all 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."* Daniel 3:4-6. This left no one out. It included all people who are near enough to hear the herald. It was not a request, but a command. Everyone bowed down in fear of their lives, except for Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Some of the leaders reported this to King Nebuchadnezzar, informing him that there were three Jews who did not do as he had instructed. King Nebuchadnezzar was enraged and summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to question them. They confirmed that they didn't need to defend themselves, and if thrown into the furnace, that God would be able to deliver them, but even if He does not they firmly declare they will never serve other gods or worship the idol you Nebuchadnezzar set up.

King Nebuchadnezzar is absolutely furious and orders that the furnace is heated up seven times more than the normal heat, and that the strongest soldiers should tie the three young men up and throw them into the furnace. The furnace was so hot that the soldiers who threw Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into the furnace died due to the heat. This furnace was not usually used for killing people, but most likely for melting gold and would have been running at about 2000 degrees centigrade. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego should have burned up the moment that they fell into the furnace.

But God steps in...

Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked

his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?"

They replied, "Certainly, Your Majesty."

He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods." Daniel 3:24-25.

Wow! Whether it was a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ himself or an angel of the Lord representing Jesus, it was the presence of God right in the fire that delivered them.

Nebuchadnezzar calls them out of the furnace, and the Biblical account says that not even a hair on their heads was burnt, nothing of their clothes were singed or burnt, and they didn't even smell of smoke. The only thing that was burnt off was the ropes that had bound them.

From our story, there are three application points that are relevant to our lives today.

1. Courage

"If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, (do you believe that) and he will deliver us[from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." Daniel 3:17-18. This moment of courage had massive consequences. The pathway of comfort was easy - they just had to bow down - but this kind of life-altering courage is costly. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego didn't choose to suffer (to be thrown into the furnace), but they did choose God's will - even though it entailed suffering.

If you are looking to walk in God's will for your life, there are going to be trials and suffering. It's going to require courage. Mark Driscoll makes this statement about comfort: "If your goal is comfort and ease, eventually you will deny your God."

So how were Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego so courageous with certain death awaiting them? Their understanding of God's sovereignty and lordship meant they trusted in Him 100%, and that gave them such courage that they literally had no fear of man and no fear of death.

They knew God could deliver them, but had the courage to be faithful and trust God fully even if He chose not to. They understood that they would be delivered either from death or through death.

As Paul says in Philippians 1:21: *For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain*; the ultimate goal is to do the will of God even if it entails suffering. This is a wonderful reminder for us to live with an eternal perspective. It also gives us such courage and confidence in Christ, in not just His ability to deliver us but also His promise to walk with us through the valleys and furnaces of this life.

2. Conviction

Right from their arrival in Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego

had chosen whom they would serve and worship. In chapter 1, we saw how they refused to eat the royal food. This incident with the furnace took place some 15 years later, and their convictions hadn't changed. When questioned by Nebuchadnezzar, their response comes from a place of deep conviction and faith in their God: *"King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. . . . We want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."* Daniel 3:16.

This poses some questions for us: What do we stand for; what convictions do we live by; what do we believe? We must settle this in our hearts and minds because if we don't, when the time of testing comes (which it will) the world and the culture we live in will pressure us to compromise. We need to find that deep reverence and fear of God again, and let the faith and conviction of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego inspire a fresh strength in our convictions for what we believe and stand for.

If we are not setting the culture in our homes, marriages, workplaces, then someone else is - that "someone" is the same evil spirit that we see at work throughout the old testament distracting God's people to worship idols. Let the banner over our lives be that of Joshua: *"...But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."* Joshua 24:15.

3. Commission

Everyone's attention was focused on the statue - this counterfeit king - they had come to worship. In an instant, the focus changes to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and their faith in the King of kings that they serve, and God is glorified: *Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "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. It wasn't the struggle or strength of these three men but rather their courage to stand on the convictions of their faith that pointed people to God.

As Christ-followers, we have been saved into a Kingdom that is not of this world but has a mandate to save this world through the work of its King, Jesus Christ. Imagine going through this lockdown without the kingdom of God - all we would be doing is surviving - but because we are in a Kingdom that has a commission, we have a mandate to fulfil. We don't have to become full-time missionaries or pastors to do that, but rather let the courage and convictions of our faith be evident in your lives - not only in easier times but far more importantly in the tough "furnace" times - that's when it really counts.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego could look death in the face with absolutely no fear; they stated they did not need to defend themselves. They were spoken for. They had an Advocate and a Deliverer.

Just like Jesus (or an angel representing Jesus) stood in the furnace with these guys, so it points forward to Jesus who went to stand in our place - to save us from an eternal furnace under the wrath of God against our sin. Then Jesus walks out of His tomb on the third day, having defeated death and the fires of hell, just like He walked them out of this furnace.

The truth is that there is an eternal furnace described in Mathew 13:50: *...a blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* The flames of this furnace are far more significant than those created by Nebuchadnezzar. These flames of hell are the eternal punishment for our sins, which we all deserve, yet Jesus chose to pay that eternal price once and for all, that whoever believes in him shall not have to perish in the flames but have eternal life (John 3:16).