

ESF, Lord's day service message
12/2/2018

Triumph of Faith
Daniel 3:16-30

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, "King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ 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."

¹⁹ 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 ²⁰ and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. ²¹ So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. ²² 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, ²³ and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

²⁴ 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."

²⁵ 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."

²⁶ 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, ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ 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. ²⁹ 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.” ³⁰ Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

In this text, when three Hebrew men lived by faith, they were able to overcome and be triumphant over a tremendous trial. Through the example of their faith, we can learn how to build up our faith to live a victorious life in all circumstances.

Faith comes from fearing God

One day while the three men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, were living with faith in God, they were forced to worship an idol. The king of the land made a big golden statue, and made a law that everybody in the land should bow down before it and worship it. The king proclaimed that if anybody did not obey the law, that person should be put to death by being thrown into a blazing furnace.

That brought a direct challenge to the faith of the three believers of God. Because bowing down before the statue meant worshiping an idol.

Worshiping any idol is a sin which is clearly forbidden by God (Exodus 20:4, Isaiah 42:8). So if they truly worshiped God, they should not worship the idol. But if they refused to worship the idol, they would be put to death. The situation put enormous pressure upon them.

They knew that they would be burnt to death if they refused worshipping the idol. However, they refused to surrender themselves to worshipping the idol. How? By bold faith. How could they have such bold faith that could enabled them to overcome the fear of death?

They feared God more than they feared the king. By fearing God more than the king, they were able to have such bold faith.

Jesus said, "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear. Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you fear him" (Luke 12:4,5).

When we fear God we will have no fear of men. David wrote in Psalm 112:1 & 7 *Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who finds great delight in his commands. He will have no fear of bad news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD.*

One of the early church fathers, John Chrysostom, lived in the late 4th and early 5th century. One day he was brought before the emperor and commanded to renounce Christ. The emperor threatened him saying if he would not renounce Christ he would be banished from the country forever—he would be separated from his father's land for the rest of his life. John responded, "You cannot. The whole world is my Father's land. You cannot banish me."

The emperor then said, "Then I will take away all of your property and treasures." John replied, "You cannot, for all my true treasures are in heaven."

The emperor then said, “I will send you to a place of absolute solitude where there is not one friend for you to talk to.” John said, “You cannot, for I have a friend that is closer than a brother to me. He is my elder brother, Jesus Christ, who has promised to be with me always—to the very end of the age.”

In anger the emperor then said, “I will then take your life.” John said, “You cannot. For my life is forever hidden in Christ with God.”

When we live by faith, we also face difficult challenges. Although we may not face the same challenge today as those people faced, we face similar challenges. People may not make a gold statue and force us to worship it. But there may be many different kinds of idols which today’s people worship and force believers to worship. What is an idol?

An idol can be anything but God you fear most or you love most. An idol can be anything but God which you put at the center of your heart and pursue with your whole heart. An idol can be a thing, a person, an institution, a status, an ideology or whatever people regard as the most important or powerful object in their life.

Then why is there always pressure to worship idols in our lives? Because idols are visible, and easy for us to grasp, touch and understand. Because behind the idols there may be great powers like the king in this text. Because the power can seemingly deliver immediate help to our needs. Because the power seemingly has absolute authority and promises prosperity and happiness.

How can we overcome the power of these idols? Only by faith that comes from fearing God. If we fear God more than anybody or anything, God will give us bold faith. With bold faith we can overcome all stresses and fears.

Faith comes from recognizing trials as the tools of God’s blessings

When the three men overcame such an enormous pressure through faith, their faith came from believing in an eternal life. We can see their faith in an eternal life in the confession they made before the king:

King Nebuchadnezzar... 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.

They believed that God would deliver them, either by sparing them from the fire or by taking them on to heaven if they had to die in the fire. They believed that the death in fire was not the end of their lives. They believed that beyond physical death, there is an eternal life. They believed that the fire was just a trial that tested their faith.

When we believe that all kinds of trial, even the trial of physical death are not the end of our lives but just as God's test of our faith, we can endure trials. God will strengthen our faith through trials and enable us to overcome all fears.

A team of scientist created a world inside a giant sphere with the goal of creating a simulated living condition for humans underground. The site was tested by the team - they lived in the structure for two years, studying the variety of mini environments in the sphere. The Biosphere had many aspects of this world simulated within the structure - desert, rain forest and even a mini ocean. The Biosphere could duplicate any weather condition except wind. This seemed like a minor problem for a while. But the effects of the windless environment became apparent later on. Many of the trees that were taken into the sphere bent to the ground and broke. Why? Because they didn't have the wind to build strength into their trunks. The trees were unable to hold up their own weight.

We all face difficult challenges in our lives- difficulties at work, difficulties at home, and difficulties in social circles. Difficult challenges in our lives are necessary to test our faith and to build our strength, as a tree needs wind to build its strength. If there is no difficult challenge in our lives, or if we just try to avoid difficult challenges, we may become like windless trees which have no strength to stand.

God allows us to go through stressful times and difficult challenges to develop strength in us. So believe that God has given you the faith to take difficult challenges to build up strength. Take all stressful challenges as opportunities to build up your faith to be stronger.

Faith comes from fixing our eyes upon Jesus

When the three men refused to worship the idol, they were thrown into the blazing furnace. They fell into the fiery furnace still tied up. The words “tied up, firmly tied” are mentioned 3 times in this passage (v.20, 23, 24). Their faith brought them to the circumstance of being tied up, bound, and put into a blazing fire. That was the price they were paying for refusing to worship the idol.

When you serve the living God and refuse to compromise with idols in this world, the world may force you to pay the price. Sometimes the price will be costly. You may lose your job. You may lose your good status. You may lose lots of money. You may lose people or friends. You may be rejected, publicly insulted and humiliated.

If the story ends there the three young believers would be losers and most pitiful people.

But God protected them from the flames of the fire. God freed them from the fire. God rescued them from the blazing furnace. How? By sending the fourth man into the fire: *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.”*

Who was the fourth man? The king said, the fourth man ‘looks like a son of the gods’ His statement of the fourth man came from unbeliever’s observation.

But, the three believers knew who the fourth man was. The fourth man was not “a son of the gods”, but the Son of God, the Savior. God sent the Savior to rescue the three young believers from the burning fire. The three young believers fix their eyes not on the burning fire but on the fourth man, the Savior, the Son of God. They were saved from the burning fire by fixing their eyes on the Savior.

The words of Hebrews encourage us to fix our thoughts and eyes on Jesus in all trials.

Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest (Hebrews 3:1).

fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2).

Jesus said that if we live by faith, and do not compromise our faith with the power in this world, trials may come to our lives. Jesus never promised that believers can live a trial free life. But Jesus promises that He will let us overcome all trials (John 16:33).

Are you in the midst of trials? Do you feel that you are in a fiery furnace and there is no way out? Turn your eyes from the fiery trial to the Son of God, the Savior. He knows how to deliver you. He is the only one who can deliver you from the fiery trial.