

Walk by Faith – Faith Under and In the Fire

7/29/18 – Pastor Randy

Daniel 3

King Nebuchadnezzar made a gold statue ninety feet tall and nine feet wide and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. ² Then he sent messages to the high officers, officials, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and all the provincial officials to come to the dedication of the statue he had set up...

⁴ Then a herald shouted out, "People of all races and nations and languages, listen to the king's command! ⁵ When you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes, and other musical instruments, bow to the ground to worship King Nebuchadnezzar's gold statue. ⁶ Anyone who refuses to obey will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace."

But some of the astrologers went to the king and informed on the Jews. ⁹ They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "Long live the king! ¹⁰ You issued a decree requiring all the people to bow down and worship the gold statue... That decree also states that those who refuse to obey must be thrown into a blazing furnace. ¹² But there are some Jews—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—whom you have put in charge of the province of Babylon. They pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They refuse to serve your gods and do not worship the gold statue you have set up."

¹³ Then Nebuchadnezzar flew into a rage and ordered that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought before him... ¹⁴ Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you refuse to serve my gods or to worship the gold statue I have set up? ¹⁵ I will give you one more chance to bow down and worship the statue I have made... 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?"

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. ¹⁷ If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve **is able to save us. He will rescue us** from your power, Your

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Majesty. ¹⁸ **But even if he doesn't**, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up."

Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury...And he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace.... Because the king's order was urgent and the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego...

²⁴ Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished...He declared to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?" They answered... "True, O king." ²⁵ He answered and said, "But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods."

²⁶ Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace; he declared, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here!" Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire.... The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them. ²⁸ Nebuchadnezzar... said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God. ²⁹ Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way.

In Hebrews 11 we have a list of heroes of the faith. Men and women whose faith stood strong in the face of intense opposition. After focusing on the details of the faith-inspired faithfulness of several of these heroes the author moves quickly through a list of other heroes of the faith, some who he names and others whose names he leaves out, choosing to instead mention the victories accomplished through their faith: They conquered kingdoms,

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enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. There is no doubt that he was referencing Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego when he wrote about those who by faith “quenched the power of fire”.

So let’s talk about the example of these men whose faith-inspired faithfulness is celebrated in Hebrews 11.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are the Babylonian names for three Hebrew youth who, along with Daniel (who “stopped the mouths of lions”), were taken captive by King Nebuchadnezzar and brought back to Babylon a few years prior to the Babylonian invasions of Judah which resulted in the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the temple.

Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and Daniel were young men who were committed to love the one true God who revealed Himself to Abraham, and His law through Moses, but now they had to do that in a difficult place; a land where they were in the minority numerically and a land where the power structures of the society were influenced by beliefs and values that were in opposition to their beliefs and values. They were in a land that was foreign to them culturally and hostile to them spiritually.

Last week as we looked at the example of Abraham we learned that the NT draws a connection between Abraham and Christians. Just as Abraham was called to leave from his land of idolatry and journey through life towards God’s destiny, Christians are also called to “come out’ from our worship to the false gods of this world, and to live as “aliens and foreigners” in this present world as we look forward to our eternal home in the new creation.

We have already seen that the NT prepares Christians for the battles we will face when we decide to choose faithfulness to God and His word. Our beliefs

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and values as Christians will set us apart from those who don't hold those beliefs and values. The story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego provides insight and encouragement to Christians who are trying to walk by faith in Babylon.

When you are walking in Babylon you better make sure you are walking by faith. It is easy to worship Jesus in church and to talk about your faith among other Christians. But our faith is tested when we are in the company of those who do not adhere to it, accept it, and possibly even stand against it. When walking in Babylon we need a faith that operates on two levels. We need a strong faith that God's word is true and a strong faith that it is authoritative.

1. "First level" faith is faith that is grounded on truth; that God's Word is true.

They needed faith based on facts, not falsehood! They needed to know Who to believe and what to believe. They needed faith in a revelation from God, not faith in their own imagination about God. They needed to know that the ten commandments were not the word of Moses, but the word of God.

It was their faith that informed their understanding that bowing down to Nebuchadnezzar's statue would have been an offense to their God. If the first two commandments from God did not say, "You shall have no other gods before me and you shall not make an idol and bow down and worship it", they would have been fools for not bowing down and they would have ended up fried.

This first level faith is the faith to discern right from wrong, good from evil. You and I can't follow Jesus faithfully if we don't even educate ourselves about the content of our faith. What we believe about God and His will precedes our need to believe it strongly. If our belief is not correct it doesn't matter how strong our convictions are!

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The terrorists who hijacked our planes and flew them into the twin towers were people whose faith convictions were sincerely and strongly held. But that did not make their actions any less evil.

Don't assume that we are incapable of believing things that are contrary to God's word due to the influence of our surrounding culture. As our culture has become more secular and drifted farther and farther from its historic understanding of marriage, it is not surprising that an ever greater number of Christians are expressing doubt about Bible's teaching on the matter.

The abolition of slavery in Britain and the US was driven by people whose anti-slavery position was correctly informed by scripture. However, pro-slavery forces deceived themselves into believing that the African slave trade could be justified from the bible. There have been other people who sincerely believed that the bible provided a legitimate basis for laws against interracial marriage. These positions, although sincerely held, were based on distortions of the principles of scripture.

Far too many Christians do not know God's word sufficiently to make proper distinctions between right and wrong, good and evil. Many listen to God's word on Sunday and read Deepak Chopra and other "new age" nonsense during the week. We pray on Sunday but consult the horoscope on Monday. We worship God on Sunday and gold the rest of the week.

Some know better but many just haven't learned what the scripture teaches.

Once we make sure our faith is grounded in the truth of God's word, we then need to move to the second level of faith.

2. Second level faith, trusts that God's word is not just true, but authoritative.

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This level of faith not only correctly discerns the will of God, but is completely convinced that God's word is worth following even when it is difficult. It is a strong enough faith that leads to faith-inspired faithfulness.

This kind of faith trusts God enough to stand on his word even when we are under fire and in the fire.

A) Walking by faith in Babylon requires a faith that is strong enough to stand by its convictions even when contrary to public opinion. (i.e. Peer Pressure)

It is easy to worship Jesus in church and to talk about our faith among other Christians. But our faith is tested when we are in the company of those who do not adhere to it, accept it, and possibly even stand against it.

Most of us don't like sticking out like a sore thumb. Few of us feel totally comfortable being an outsider. Think about the psychology of standing ovations. You might not really be convinced the performance deserved a standing ovation, but as everyone else around you stands up it becomes more difficult to remain seated. It works the same way when the crowd is bowing down.

When the pressure is turned on against our faith convictions it is easy for our mind to engage in rationalizations and justifications for why it is acceptable for us to bow down. I wonder if Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego ever entertained thoughts like, "You know we can bow down physically, but really be standing up in our hearts", or "God wouldn't really want us to risk our lives over something so silly as bowing down to a statue. If we die, we will never have the chance to influence the King to be kind to our people back in Judah!"

Young people, if you find yourself with a group of peers who are gossiping about another student or engaging in bullying another student, you will need faith to stand up against the bullies and the gossips. Don't go along with the

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crowd when the crowd is doing what you know is wrong. Let God and His word direct your decisions, not the pressure from your peers!

When I was in my early teens I had strong convictions about drugs. I wasn't going to touch the stuff. When my friends first started to experiment with drugs I declined their offers, but I still hung around with them. After a while my resistance broke down, my convictions softened, and I decided it was just easier and more fun to join the crowd. You can do it alone because you have the Holy Spirit with you! But God has also created the church so we don't have to go it alone! The main problem was that I tried to do it alone.

Illustration: It is easier to pull someone down than up.

Ecclesiastes 4:12 - *And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.* Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego not only had the Lord to strengthen them, they also had each other. They were a threefold cord.

B) Walking by faith requires a faith that is strong enough to stand by its convictions even in the face of loss of life or livelihood.

Sometimes the challenges to walking by faith in Babylon are greater than the challenge of swimming against the tide. Sometimes it results in real threats.

In November of last year, ***The Alliance***, a website of the CMA Denomination ran the story of a young 14-year old girl from Burkina Faso whose strong faith helped her stand in the face of persecution. You can read her story [HERE](#).

My brother worked as the VP of Financial Planning and Analysis for a major communications company several years ago. He had a very good paying job with challenging responsibilities that were very self-satisfying. However, he faced a series of situations where the person he reported to put pressure on him to act deceptively. The final one pressured him to present numbers to

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the board that misrepresented their true financial position. His choice to stick to the truth led to his departure from the company at a time the economy was struggling and it took him two years before he found another permanent job. God blessed him by providing him with consulting work but not without significant loss of income for those two years.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's statement of faith is the best example of the kind of faith that God desires to develop in His people.

*"O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. ¹⁷ If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve **is able to save us. He will rescue us** from your power, Your Majesty. ¹⁸ **But even if he doesn't**, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up."*

God IS able to deliver me! I believe God CAN do the impossible!

God WILL deliver me! I believe God WILL do the impossible!

BUT...even IF he doesn't! I believe that obeying and honoring God is more important than self-preservation.

The story ends with a miraculous deliverance resulting in God being glorified by the unbelieving Babylonians.

*Nebuchadnezzar... said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego
"there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way"*

God's power would be recognized and His name would be praised more frequently if we were willing to obey to the point of being endangered for the sake of Jesus name and His righteousness. Why doesn't God deliver like this today? He does, but not when His people rescue themselves by running away from their commitment to God and His truth. When we bow down to the idols that this world demands us to worship, God has no need to rescue us - we have rescued ourselves.

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