

Stand and Be Delivered

Daniel 3:16-28 (NIV)

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.

Three men stand before their king. The threat of execution hangs over their heads. "Will you bow down to the image of gold that I have set up?" the king asks. The three men search for the words of what to say in response.

How did these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, get here? They had been residents of Judah, loyal to the king who reigned in Jerusalem, the one from David's line. But then in 605 B.C., King Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian army came and laid siege to the holy city of Jerusalem. Their king was captured. Their holy place of worship, the Temple, was ransacked. These three young men were led off along with the author of this book, Daniel. They were bright. They had a future, but a future that they had not envisioned. These three along with Daniel were whisked into service for Nebuchadnezzar. They were given new names, Babylonian names, names that praised the gods of Babylon and tried to erase their loyalty to the true God. They studied and learned for three years to serve their new king.

But when King Nebuchadnezzar built a golden statue some 90 feet tall and 9 feet wide and commanded everyone to bow down and worship it on his command, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego could not do it. Their haters called them out to the king. The king called them forward to answer for their actions. He made it simple: bow down, and no harm done; refuse, and you will immediately be thrown into the fiery furnace. "Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?" (verse 15)

The three men made their reply, "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." (verses 16-18) It was a bold answer, a defiant answer. Had they given a simple "no," they would have been thrown into the fiery furnace and that would have been the end of that story. But they took this moment, standing in front of the most powerful king in the Middle East at the time, and declared that they would never ever bow down and worship the golden image that the king had set up. "Our God is the only God. He is powerful enough to save us from the fiery furnace. But even if we die right now by your hand, he will deliver us. This is why we will only worship him."

Could you be so bold answering a nation's leader? If the threat of execution hung over your head as if you were already strapped in to the stocks of the guillotine with the blade ready to come down as you gave your answer, would you be defiant and serve God only up to the end, even if it cost you your life?

It was just about a month ago that someone walked into a school in Oregon and started killing people. One witness reported that the gunman asked Christians to stand up and told them that they were about to meet God in one second. Then he shot the Christians who stood up. The gunman singled out and killed those who professed to be Christians. Make no mistake about it. You, me may very well have our life on the line when it comes to professing our faith. When that day comes, will we be so bold as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? Will we stand up, stand up for Jesus, ye soldiers of the cross? Would we risk our lives instead of ever serving anything else other than God alone? Honestly, we can talk all we want about what we would do on that day, but it's speculation. None of us know what we will do unless we are actually in that situation.

What about when there isn't a gun held to our head or a threat of being thrown into a fiery furnace? What about in average, normal, everyday living? Do you hold the same attitude as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego every day, that you would rather die than serve anyone or anything in place of the one and only true God? When it comes to being tempted on any regular day to serve yourself rather than God, what do you do? When you are tempted to put yourself first, what you want, what you desire, as it comes in conflict with serving God, what do you do? When the promise of pleasure comes calling, telling you to forget about what God has told you to do, to forget about his commands and serving him first and foremost, do you heed the call or say, "Away from me, Satan!"?

I don't need the extreme case of having a death threat hang over me to answer that question of would I always put God first and serve him only as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did before King Nebuchadnezzar. I failed to do this, not when my life hung in the balance, but on a Tuesday, an average, typical, normal day. There was nothing special about the circumstances in which I was tempted, but I gave in to it. I pushed God aside in my life for what I wanted.

How the expression of my faith pales in comparison to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They were faithful. What did their faithfulness to God get them? A sentence to be thrown into the fiery furnace, one heated seven times hotter than normal.

The one who really deserves to be tossed in to the fiery furnace was not Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, but me. I push God aside on normal, average days without any threat of death hanging over my head. I did not stand up faithfully for God, but I gave in to temptation. I sinned against God Almighty, and I've done it repeatedly. Sin, wrongdoing against God, separates me from him. It pushes me away from him and into the fiery furnace of hell. That's what I deserve for my disloyalty, my disobedience, my unfaithfulness. I deserve to be tossed into the hottest fiery furnace that has ever existed. All of us, when we come face to face with our disobedience, how we failed to stand up for Jesus, whether it was in the heat of the moment or just a normal, average day, we deserve to be tossed into the fiery furnace of hell.

But God delivers. This is the hope and confidence that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego confessed. "The God we serve is able to deliver us." (verse 17) And deliver them he did. King Nebuchadnezzar outraged by the defiance of these three men ordered the furnace to be made seven times hotter than usual. He also ordered the strongest of his soldiers to bind the three men for their trip into the furnace. The furnace was made so hot that the soldiers were filled by the flames just by getting the three men to the opening of the fiery furnace. In Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego went.

Then the realization set in. King Nebuchadnezzar was looking forward to watching these men burn, but instead he leaped to his feet in amazement of what he saw. "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire? ... Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods." (verses 24-25) They were not burning. They were not even bound anymore. They were simply walking around the furnace, the hottest one they had ever done for an execution like this with an angel accompanying them, God's protective servant.

Nebuchadnezzar called them out. The king and his officials gathered around the three men. Not a hair on their heads was singed. Not even their clothes were scorched. They didn't even smell of smoke! 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." (verse 28)

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not deserve to be delivered. Their deliverance wasn't contingent on their standing up for God that caused God to deliver them. No, they had that promise well before they stood up before the king. They believed that God would deliver them because he had promised to do so. Not in the specific way of them not being burned in the fiery furnace, but that he would send the Immanuel born of a virgin in Bethlehem, the suffering servant who would stand up for them even to the point of being pierced for their transgressions and crushed for their iniquities. This Anointed One, the Messiah, the Passover Lamb would stand up for God because they don't just as we don't. He would allow himself to suffer the burning fires of hell as he was forsaken by God on the cross, separated from him because he held on his shoulders all of our sins. He stood firm in serving the one and only true God, and because he did so, he delivered not just Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the literal fiery furnace, but also all of us from the fiery furnace of hell.

Because Jesus Christ stood up for God in our place at all times we know that God will deliver us, just like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego knew. The three men knew that their stand for God could certainly end in their death, but even in death, God would deliver them. He delivers us from evil, wicked people who force us to decide between serving God or anything other than God. God delivered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace. He delivered those who died for standing up for him who were then shot by the gunman in Oregon. He delivered them to their heavenly home. No matter the persecution we experience in this life, God will deliver us. He has done it in the past, and he will continue to do so because he stood up for us and saved us from our sins.

Knowing that God will deliver us, we make our stand for him – not just when our life is on the line physically, but when our life is on the line spiritually. When we are tempted to remove God as first in our lives, tempted to serve ourselves rather than him, we make our stand. We say like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, “We will not serve your gods.” (verse 18) We will not serve anything except God alone. We make our stand knowing with complete confidence that God will deliver us. Amen.

November 1, 2015

Pastor Jonathan Klein

pastorklein@lightofthevalley-wels.org