

Daniel 3:16

Daniel 3:14-21

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Have you ever been faced with a situation where to do what's right or to do what's smart seemed to be your only two options? Maybe it's a matter of doing the right thing, and not doing the wrong thing.

While you know what you should do, at the same time you're doing a quick cost analyst in your head.

If I do this, what will it cost me in terms of friends, money or job security? Should I speak up or remain silent on an issue? Sometimes silence is golden, sometimes it's just plain cowardice.

That dilemma, *"To do what's right or do what's smart,"* is the question at the heart of today's 3:16.

This morning, we're looking at Daniel 3:16, *"Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, 'King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter.'"*

Three young men who were doing what they knew was right were now going to pay the ultimate price.

Because they had disobeyed a royal decree, they were to be put to death, and not just any death. They were to be thrown into an immense furnace.

Our story this morning happened after Babylon had conquered Israel.

The Babylonian King, a man by the name of Nebuchadnezzar, had ordered that the most promising young captives from Jerusalem were to be brought to Babylon as his personal slaves.

This story is about three of those young men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. However, those were not the names with which they were born.

In their homeland, they were known as Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. But, part of the slavery process in Babylon was to erase a captive's identity.

So, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah's birth names were taken away and they were given the Babylonian names of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

This practice wasn't confined to customs 3000 years ago, slaves brought over to America from Africa were given new names, and immigrants arriving from Europe were often given Americanized names.

For three years Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were taught and trained in the court of the king.

At the end of their training, they graduated as honor students; after which they were appointed as advisers in the King's Court.

Three years later, for some reason, King Nebuchadnezzar had a huge idol created and erected. Now this could be the same idol revealed to him in Chapter 2, regardless of why, he required it to be worshipped.

He proclaimed that when the royal musicians played a certain sound everyone was to bow down and worship the statue, even the exiled Jews.

If we had background music, like in movies, it would change to a minor key signifying that something bad was about to happen. Now, if you grew up in church then you already know the rest of the story.

When everyone else bowed, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego didn't. However Nebuchadnezzar probably thought his star pupils had misunderstood the command, so he gave them another chance.

This morning, I want to look at the response of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to the choice they faced: Obey God or do what seems like the smart and practical thing.

So, instead of doing the smart and practical thing, we read in Daniel 3:16-18, *“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.”*

A common theme through this series seems to be that as followers of Christ we are required to believe. John 3:16, we need to believe that God sent his Son.

Acts 3:16, the crippled man had to believe that he had been healed. Joshua 3:16, the priest had to believe that the Jordan River would dry up when they stepped into it carrying the Ark of the Covenant.

So, what was it that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were called to believe? They believed that they were doing the right thing, and because of that, they were committed to their course of action.

Theirs wasn't a wimpy “Yes, I believe I'm doing the right thing” type of faith, they were willing to put everything on the line.

Talk's cheap, but what happens when doing the right thing cost you something? What happens when taking a stand cost you acceptance with your friends or your family.

What happens when your commitment to truth and integrity cost you advancement in your career. What happens when you're standing in front of the blazing furnace and you're told "Bow or Burn?"

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We discover where their belief began when we read today's 3:16. We discover that they believed in God's purpose.

Daniel 3:16, *"King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter."*

They knew what they were doing and what they had to do, they didn't need to say anything. They didn't have to convince themselves and they knew they couldn't convince the king so why waste their breath.

What were they supposed to say? It wasn't that they weren't guilty of what they were being accused; they were. But they weren't the only ones in the Bible who took that approach.

Matthew 27:12-14, *"When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. Then Pilate asked him, 'Don't you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?' But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge—to the great amazement of the governor."*

Jesus didn't have to convince Himself and He knew that He wouldn't convince Pilate or the leaders.

When Martin Luther took a stand against the Catholic Church 500 years ago, he was called in front of the powers that be and was offered the chance to change his mind.

Much like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were given a chance to change their minds, Luther said, *“Here I stand; I can do no other. God help me.”*

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Their answer continues in Daniel 3:17, *“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.”*

Their faith was grounded in the fact that they believed in God’s protection.

Maybe they were thinking of the stories of how God had delivered His people time after time when they were faithful. Of Noah and Moses, of Abraham and David and a host of others.

Perhaps they remembered the words of Psalms 55:16-18, where David wrote: *“As for me, I call to God, and the LORD saves me. Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice. He rescues me unharmed from the battle waged against me, even though many oppose me.”*

We all have experienced or know someone who has experienced the direct intervention of God. God will protect and keep us.

Like Jesus told the apostles in the Garden of Gethsemane in Matthew 26:53, *“Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?”*

Sigmund Freud said, *“I cannot think of any need in childhood as strong as the need for a father’s protection.”*

And I can’t think of any need in our relationship with Christ as the need for our heavenly father’s protection.

We need to realize that God cares about us, and we need to be able to stand with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and believe, *“The God whom we serve is able to save us.”*

As powerful as their faith was in what they were doing and as strong as their faith was in God’s protecting hand, I think that the most incredible and powerful statement is yet to come.

Most of us can stand and say, *“I believe that I’m doing what is right and I believe that God will take care of me.”*

But how many of us have the faith to echo those words when coupled with these in Daniel 3:18, *“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.”*

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You see, ultimately they believed in God’s plan! God will save us, but if He doesn’t then we’ll still obey Him.

God protects His people, but sometimes that belief doesn’t save us physically. If He did there’d be no martyrs.

1 Peter 3:12-14, *“For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.”*

One of my favorite sections of the Bible is found in Hebrews 11, it’s the faith Hall of Fame. In it we read about heroes of the Old Testament, people like Noah and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses and Joshua.

Listen to what the bible says about these servants of God.

Hebrews 11:32-35, *“And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection.”*

That’s the list I want to be in. The list of the winners, the victors as they trusted God and God came through. God is good. But, let’s keep reading...

Hebrews 11:35-39, *“Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised.”*

All of these people we have mentioned received God’s approval because of their faith, yet none of them received all that God had promised.

The people in the second group were serving the same God as the people in the first group.

We’re told by those in the know that there have been more martyrs in the last hundred years than there were in the nineteen hundred years before that.

Yet God hasn't tumbled off his throne. He's still a good and merciful God. We must believe that He knows exactly what He's doing.

Over fifty years ago five young missionaries flew to South America to reach a tribe that had never heard the name of Jesus.

One of those missionaries, a young man by the name of Jim Elliot made this statement, *"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose."*

It wasn't long after he made that statement that he and his companions were killed by the very people he went to reach. People around the world reacted in shock to the news of the slaughter.

How could God allow that? But Jim Elliot's wife, Elizabeth, eventually saw that entire tribe come to know Jesus.

Elliot couldn't have kept his life even if he had lived to be a hundred, and yet how many people will live for eternity because of Jim Elliot's sacrifice?

Let's go back to the story. As Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stood staring into the flames of the furnace they said, *"God will deliver us, but if he doesn't, we still won't bow."*

Their response wasn't what the king was expecting to hear; he was furious. He commanded that the three be tossed into the furnace.

From the description given of the furnace it appears that it was commonly used for executions; that is, it was constructed in such a way that the accused were tossed in through an opening in the top.

In this case the fire was burning so hot and so furious that it actually killed the soldiers who threw them in.

Is this the end of the story; they took a stand for God and lost? Good was defeated and evil was victorious?

Daniel 3:24-26, *“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!’”*

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Conclusion

Their belief was proven. God was there. He had a plan and it entailed keeping those three young men alive.

They were to go on and play an integral part of the Government of Babylon during the time the people of Israel were in exile. A measly little thing like a blazing furnace wasn't going to stand in God's way.

But, who was the fourth man? There have been different theories, some have said it was an angel, others Jesus. The truth is we don't know, but we do know that he was there for a purpose.

Whether we burn in the trials or whether we don't burn in the trials, God's promise is that He'll be there for us.

Hebrews 13:5, *“Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’”*

Do you believe that this morning? Perhaps you're standing at the door of your own furnace.

My prayer for you today is that you have the faith to not only believe that God will do what is good, but also to believe that whatever God chooses to do will be good.

I hope and pray that the prayer of your heart will be the same as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's, "*But even if he does not...*"