

Main Idea: In Daniel 3:19-30, which is the account of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and the fiery furnace, we see two results of radical faith.

- I. Radical faith may result in greater problems (19-23).
 - A. They felt the heat of the king (19).
 - B. They felt the heat of the furnace (20-23).
 1. They were bound.
 2. They were fully clothed
 3. They were subjected to increased heat.
- II. Radical faith may result in greater privileges (24-30).
 - A. The ungodly were pricked (24-27).
 1. Instead of seeing three men, they saw four.
 2. Instead of seeing pain, they saw God.
 - B. God was praised (28-29).
 1. Honor Him for who He is.
 2. Honor Him for what He did.
 - C. The godly were promoted (30).

Take Inventory: Two questions to consider...

1. Am I faithful?
2. Am I showing people that God is faithful?

Last week, as we opened God’s Word together, we saw God-exalting radical faith. This week, as we finish the story, we’ll see the *result* of radical faith. I’d like to read last week’s text to set the stage for this week’s message.

Scripture Reading: Daniel 3:1-18

Ever been whitewater rafting? Less than a month before Sherry and I were married, my parents scheduled an opportunity for our entire family to go whitewater rafting on the New River in West Virginia. I had been around water before, and did not have a particular fear of water, but was unprepared for the exhilarating experience of running the rapids.

As we approached the first hole, as it’s called, the water rushed and swirled furiously, and my first thought was, "I can't go through *that*! Let me out of here and put my feet on the solid shore."

We would never have made it without our guide. He spoke calmly, "We're going through. It'll be okay. You do what I tell you while you're in the raft, and you'll be fine."

He was right. The truth is I would have missed one of the most breath-taking, unforgettable experiences of my life had I followed my feelings and bailed out.

That’s a good picture of how faith works. *Faith is trusting in the person of God and acting on the promises of God regardless how I feel.*

I feel like getting out of the boat, but the one guiding the boat says everything is going to be okay. So I trust him and act upon his assuring promises.

The Christian life is filled with opportunities for the practice of faith. It begins by faith, of course, when we take God at His Word and put our trust in His Son and in what He accomplished for us at the cross.

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For an earlier development of this passage, see the Daniel series at WBC in 1996.

Then it continues by faith. God has indeed provided us with everything we need for godly living (2 Pet 1:3). We can honor Him in the Christian life by appropriating the resources which are ours in Jesus Christ.

And this involves choices. Daily choices. Will I trust in the person of God and act on the promises of God regardless how I feel? When I do, God gets honor and I experience great joy.

Then every so often we encounter a major challenge, a class 5 rapid of sorts. The waves are really chopping, and we feel like we're not going to make it through. Then what? What happens when we choose to trust in the person of God and act on the promises of God when it feels like choosing to do so may result in destruction?

We're going to find the answer this morning in Daniel 3. In Daniel 3:19-30, the account of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and the fiery furnace, we see two results of radical faith.

I. Radical faith may result in greater problems (19-23).

When we left off last time, we were marveling at the radical faith of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. King Nebuchadnezzar had built a golden image and commanded everyone to bow before it when the music played. Three of his cabinet members, three Jewish men, refused to bow. They made a choice to honor God when it would have been very easy to bail out.

What happens when we choose to stand up for God in difficult situations? God will send His angels and make the problem go away, right? Not exactly. That's not the way it worked for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They faced a problem, responded in a God-honoring way, and the result was that they faced *even greater problems!*

Two problems, to be specific...

A. They felt the heat of the king (19).

Notice verse 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."

Full of fury, says the AV. The LB's paraphrase is vivid, "Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury and his face became dark with anger."

Have you ever noticed that when people get angry, they at times do irrational things? For example, consider Nebuchadnezzar. He was incensed at the audacity of the three Jews to defy his command, so what did he do? With his pride wounded, his face distorted, and his anger boiling, he gave the order to turn up the furnace-heat sevenfold. As if that would increase the torment.

One commentator made this observation about Nebuchadnezzar, "And then he lost his temper! That is always the mark of a little man. His furnace was hot, but he himself got hotter! And when a man gets full of fury, he gets full of folly. There is no fool on earth like a man who has lost his temper."²

Actually, a slow fire would have produced far more torture. The king ought to have cooled the furnace seven times *less* if he wanted to hurt his subjects, but in anger he did the irrational opposite. At any rate, the three Jews felt the heat of the king.

² in Walvoord, pp. 89-90.

B. They felt the heat of the furnace (20-23).

There is some question as to what this furnace actually looked like. Gleason Archer suggests that Mesopotamian smelting furnaces tended to be like an old-fashioned glass milk-bottle in shape, with a large opening for the insertion of the ore to be smelted and a smaller aperture at ground level for the admission of wood and charcoal to furnish the heat.³ There must have been two or more smaller holes at this same level to insert pipes which were connected to large bellows which were used to raise the temperature of the fire in the furnace.

Watch how Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's problem became greater in verses 20-23. The heat of the furnace was compounded by three additional problems.

1. They were bound.

Verse 20 says, "And commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace."

The king was taking no chances. He didn't want these men to escape from the inferno (as if that was even a possibility).

And as if being cast in bonds into a fire weren't enough, they faced a second problem.

2. They were fully clothed

Verse 21 reveals, "So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace."⁴

Why the clothing? Remember, this dedication ceremony was a black-coat-and-tie affair. All the dignitaries had on their Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes.

In preparation for the furnace, Nebuchadnezzar made sure these three Jews were dressed from head to toe. It wasn't because he was worried about them catching a cold, for sure. His aim was simple, the more flammable material, the better.

3. They were subjected to increased heat.

How hot was it? Verse 22 tells us, "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."

I don't need to remind you that these "most mighty men" (as the AV refers to them in verse 20) were no wimps. Yet the heat was so intense that merely getting close to the furnace-opening killed them.

So the situation was bleak for God's servants, to say the least. When you read verse 23, you realize that humanly speaking, all hope was gone.

"And these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace."

Perhaps you're wondering, "I don't get it. Weren't these three men living for God? Why then did God allow them to face this injustice? Why didn't He do something?"

He did. But before we consider what He did *for* them, let's not miss what He was doing *in* them.

God was teaching these three servants of His to trust Him. He brought them to the end of themselves so they had nowhere else to turn. But to Him. And to find out that He is enough.

³ Gleason Archer, p. 56.

⁴ Schofield, "Then these men were bound in their coats, their stockings, and their turbans, and their other garments."

This is the lesson we learn from the book of Job. Job lost nearly everything that was important to him. But he still had what was most important to him.

“Though He slay me, yet I will trust in Him (Job 13:15).”

“But He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold (Job 23:10).”

“I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth (Job 19:25).”

In his book *A Gentle Thunder*, Max Lucado writes this about God, "Please understand. His goal is not to make you happy. His goal is to make you his. His goal is not to get you what you want; it is to get you what you need. And if that means a jolt or two to get you in your seat, then be jolted. Earthly discomfort is a glad swap for heavenly peace."⁵

My friend, if your aim in life is present comfort and happiness, you'll bail out when you see the rapids. You'll put your Bible on the shelf and stop praying, “Hallowed be Thy name.” You'll find other things to do on Sunday besides church. You'll run from your relationships. You'll quit your ministry.

That's what happens if my aim in life is present happiness. Oh, there's nothing wrong with wanting happiness, and for the child of God, it's coming. But in the present God has, and desires for us to have, a more pressing goal.

It's holiness. That, of course, is why He sent His Son to die on the cross, to take our place, to make us holy.

Every time I enter a season of intense migraine pain, as I did the first part of this week, the Lord brings me face to face with this fundamental question. *Am I enough for you?*

And, indeed, He is! It's not just that He's enough to get us through to something that will make it worthwhile on the other side. It's that *HE* is worthwhile, and we have Him now, and He is worth it.

A verse that helps me is Hebrews 12:2, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, *who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*”

There's what enabled our Savior to endure the greatest suffering imaginable, the *joy set before him*, that is, sitting once again at the right hand of God.

God is enough. Being with Him, knowing Him, savoring Him, enjoying Him. And we affirm that now...by faith.

What happens when we exhibit radical faith? First, radical faith may result in greater problems, so that in the end our capacity for joy will be even greater. There's a second potential result.

II. Radical faith may result in greater privileges (24-30).

Privileges? What kind of privileges? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego saw three wonderful privileges because they exhibited radical faith and refused to bail out.

A. The ungodly were pricked (24-27).

⁵ Max Lucado, p. 5.

That is, baffled, caught off guard, even convicted. God got the attention of the ungodly crowd that day, big time, all because our three heroes refused to bow down and bail out. The ungodly were surprised in two ways.

1. Instead of seeing three men, they saw four.

Watch Nebuchadnezzar's response in verse 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.'"

Sort of an ironic reminder here that the king is no longer in control! *Did not we cast three men, bound, into the midst of the fire (AV)?*

You can almost sense the panic that is starting to spread through the crowd. "Weren't there *three* men?!"

Yet in verse 25, "He said, 'Look! I see *four* men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed...'" Four men, not jumping, not writhing in pain, four men walking around in the fire.

But the second surprise was even bigger than the first...

2. Instead of seeing pain, they saw God.

Verse 25 concludes with this testimonial, "And the fourth looks like a son of the gods." The AV says, "like the Son of God." While I think it's very possible that the fourth person in the fire was indeed the Son of God, the preincarnate Christ, it's doubtful that an unregenerate man like Nebuchadnezzar would have comprehended this.⁶ The Aramaic term is plural, hence, "a son of the gods."

I'd like to read what happened next out of the *Living Bible*. Verses 26-27, "Then Nebuchadnezzar came as close as he could to the open door of the flaming furnace and yelled: 'Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God! Come out! Come here!' So they stepped out of the fire. Then the princes, governors, captains, and counselors crowded around them and saw that the fire hadn't touched them--not a hair of their heads was singed; their coats were unscorched, and they didn't even smell of smoke!"⁷

You can be sure that something amazing happened that day, something that would not have happened had these three men of God bailed out. The ungodly were pricked in their hearts!

Imagine what went through their minds when they saw that the same fire that killed their soldiers didn't even leave a trace of smoke on these Jews, and that the only thing burned up were the ropes!

Let's not miss that God is doing something in the lives of the ungodly throughout the book of Daniel. Notice the progression in Nebuchadnezzar's understanding of the Lord God as we move through the book. How did this pagan king and his fellow Babylonians view the God of the Jews?

•In chapter one—they saw Him as weak.

⁶ Observation by Walvoord.

⁷ The NIV of verses 26-27, "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."

After destroying Jerusalem and plundering the temple, the Babylonians no doubt came to the conclusion, "This god of the Jews is inept. He's no match for our gods." Their view of God began to change, however, in chapter two.

- In chapter two—they saw Him as great, but not personal.

After God enabled Daniel to reveal the dream to the king, remember what Nebuchadnezzar said? 2:47 "Of a truth it is that your God is the God of gods, and the Lord of kings." Now he saw the Lord as great, but he's still not personal; He's still "your" god, not "mine." In chapter three, the God of grace moves them another step closer to the truth.

- In chapter three—they saw Him as deserving respect, but not allegiance.

In verse 26, Nebuchadnezzar identifies the Lord as "the Most High God."

What's happening to the way Nebuchadnezzar views God? He's getting warmer. From weak, to great but not personal, to deserving respect as the Most High God. Is he there yet? No, and he won't be until God brings him to his knees in chapter 4.

But I think there's an important lesson here for us. As Christians, we have a mission, to make Jesus Christ known to the lost. But we can't do evangelism the way the church did it a generation ago. When I was a teenager, even my non-churched friends had at least a basic knowledge of God. If you told a non-Christian, "God loves you," he or she at least knew who you meant by "God."

But if we assume that today, we're making a serious mistake. Before we can do evangelism these days, we need to do careful pre-evangelism work. That is, we need to bring people along in their understanding of who the God of the Bible is.

Like God Himself did with Nebuchadnezzar in the book of Daniel.

So what God may want you to do for your unsaved neighbor is not take Him down the "Romans Road" (he may not be ready for that), but help him gain a proper understanding of the God who designed the Romans Road. Ask God to help you take your neighbor from where he is to where he needs to be.

Several years ago I met a man who was on medical retirement at the age of 37, and it didn't take long to realize he was hurting inside more than he was hurting physically. I began to share that God had a purpose for our lives, to which he responded, "Do you really think God had a purpose in what happened to me?" His unspoken words were, "What kind of God would allow this to happen?"

So what did that man need from me? What does your neighbor need from you? My neighbor, your neighbor, is clinging to thoughts about God and life and sin and justice. He doesn't just need a canned four point presentation. He needs to see from us that this God is so great that we live for His honor no matter what happens to us. And he needs the whole counsel of God's Word ministered to him so that he comes to know who the real God really is, and why suffering exists, and what God has done to rectify it by sending His own Son into the world, the One who suffered for us to rescue us.

The problem many of us have is we want quick results. We want to be able to say, "I led three people to Christ this month," and we move ahead of the Spirit and try to pick green fruit. We need to learn from how God dealt with Nebuchadnezzar.

Because three men of God spoke the truth regarding God and were willing to die for it, the ungodly were pricked. Consequently...

B. God was praised (28-29).

It's amazing what came from the lips of the same king who less than 15 minutes earlier was shaking his fist at three Jews and their God. He's a different man as indicated by his words in verses 28-29, where he gives us two reasons why people ought to praise and honor God.

1. Honor Him for Who He is.

Listen to verse 28, "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."

God deserves honor because of who He is. Back in verse 26 Nebuchadnezzar calls Him "the Most High God." He deserves honor because of His unique position, who He is. He is the Most High.

But He lowers Himself to care for His own. That brings us to a second reason.

2. Honor Him for what He did.

What did He do? In verse 28, a pagan king acknowledged He did this, "He sent His angel and rescued His servants!" In fact, because of what the Lord did, Nebuchadnezzar went so far as to issue a decree in verse 29:

"Therefore, I make a decree that every people, nation, and language, who speak anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a refuse heap, because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort."

Those are amazing words coming from the lips of a polytheistic king! The problem is, as chapter four will reveal, they are just words.

Do you know people like this? They speak highly of God. They respect God, and even demand the same from their kids and others ("We don't swear in this house!"). They give lipservice to God, but what's missing? They refuse to let God be God in their lives. Like Nebuchadnezzar, they may say that God is great, and that no other God can save like He does, but they refuse to give Him the absolute allegiance that He deserves from their lives.

Please realize this. God has ways of getting to the heart of the matter with people like Nebuchadnezzar, as we'll see in chapter four. He's not after simply verbal respect, but a transformed life. And we can't transform our lives, not to meet His standard. That's why He ultimately sent His Son into the world, to rescue self-seeking sinners and turn them into God-exalting trophies of His grace.

There's one more privilege in our story. Because of their radical faith...

C. The godly were promoted (30).

Verse 30, "Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon."

First thrown into the fire, then promoted by the king.

Just think of the glory-to-God opportunity that would have been missed had not these three men stood firm in their faith. Because they didn't bail out, the ungodly were pricked, God was praised, and they were promoted.

So faith is trusting in the person of God and acting on the promises of God regardless how I feel.

Take Inventory: Two questions to consider...

1. Am I faithful?

Am I a person who exhibits genuine, God-exalting faith?

I need to remind you that the point of the story in Daniel 3 is not to say that God always delivers us out of the fire. Sometimes He takes His own right through the fire to heaven.

Polycarp was burned at the stake, as have been countless other saints.

Jim Elliot and his missionary friends were martyred by the Auca Indians.

David Brainherd was only 29 years old when he died while serving as a missionary to the American Indians.

Yet each of these made the same decision we must make. When they felt like bailing out, they chose, by God's enabling grace, to remain faithful.

And this is the opportunity we face every day.

Jesus said, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross DAILY, and follow me (Luke 9:23)." The challenge of the Christian life is that it is so *daily*. Every day, by the grace of God, we must choose to be faithful.

Be faithful like Noah, who was committed to obeying God's will regardless of the mocking of his peers. Be faithful like Moses who chose to suffer affliction with God's people rather than enjoying the pleasures of sin for a season (Heb 11:25). Be faithful like David who likewise was committed to doing God's will, so much so that instead of taking matters into his own hands and killing Saul, he waited on the Lord. Be faithful like Stephen, a man who because of his commitment to his Savior, was stoned to death and subsequently escorted to heaven by angels.

And be faithful like our Lord Jesus Christ, who, to say it again, "for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb 12:2)."

When we feel like bailing out, don't. Choose to be faithful.

But is it possible? Is it possible to be faithful to God these days? Yes. Why? The same reason the three Jews could. Which brings us to our second question.

2. Am I showing people that God is faithful?

Remember, God is faithful. And to keep this truth before us, I urge you to memorize 1 Corinthians 10:13, "God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear; but will with the temptation make a way of escape, so that you can bear up under it."

Are you facing a situation now where you feel like bailing out? Maybe it's a relationship that's a constant source of heartache. Or a job that's grinding you down.

Then affirm that God is faithful. He has a way of escape in this situation, a way for me to bear up under the situation to His honor.

So the question isn't, how can I get out of this? But rather, what course of action is my faithful God giving me that will lead to His maximum glory and my maximum eternal joy, which indeed are inseparable?