

January 29, 2023
Faith in Exile: When They Say I Must
Daniel 3:8-27
Vernon Advent Christian Church

When we used to live in Virginia, part of my responsibilities at the church we were serving was to be involved in the summer camping ministry of our conference camp. Over the 5 years that we were there, I would have the same conversation with the Camp Director, Miss Josie, and it involved the fact that she didn't understand how folks could spend hundreds of dollars on tickets to sporting events or concerts, where they would stand to their feet and scream at the top of their lungs for their favorite athlete or singer and yet when there was something going on at the church, if they were not inconvenienced to come at all, they were not as enthusiastic as they had been celebrating at the other events. Christ Hodges talks about this very idea in his book, *The Daniel Dilemma*, when he says, "It's normal for us to hoop and holler, scream and shout, paint our faces and high five total strangers at a football game (or even in our living room watching a football game), but we feel uncomfortable if someone raises their hands or sings out "Amen!" in a worship service. Now, God doesn't mind that we enjoy watching or playing sports. And I, for one, am glad for that, but he does mind when we don't put him first and we celebrate other things as more important than him. God created us in his own image as spiritual beings and we were made to worship. When we are not worshipping our creator, then we are trying to put something else in his rightful place. This is what the Bible calls idolatry, which is simply offering our hearts to anyone or anything that isn't God. God is very specific and to the point on this matter in the first two commandments he gave the Israelites on Mt. Sinai when he said in Ex. 20, "You are to have no other gods before me," and "You are not to make an idol in the form of any created thing and worship it." You may not have a shrine at home with carved images made out of stone or wood as the Israelites did. But that doesn't mean that you and I don't have a problem with worshiping the created rather than the Creator. Again, Hodges, in *The Daniel Dilemma*, puts forth the following questions that we, as followers of Christ, must often ask ourselves to gauge if God is in the right place in our lives. "What matters most to me? Whom do I care about most? Who or what gets my devoted allegiance and loyalty? What is my top priority? Where does all my time, energy, and money go?"

In our world today we have no shortage of "idols" to choose from. The world offers to us what it deems as important and valuable. And we, as followers of Christ, as exiles in a country not our own, must make the choice every day to be grounded in the Word of God and not influenced by the culture around us which is constantly trying to fit us into its mold by bowing down and offering our worship to popularity, money, and fame which never can fully satisfy our souls. The Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans in Ch. 12:2, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." But we know that this is far easier to say than to put into practice.

John MacArthur, author and Pastor of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, CA once said, "Our decisions, our attitudes, and our behaviors are determined by one of two things: external pressure or internal principle. And the battle is going on all the time in our lives between these two conflicting items." The bottom line is this, do we do what we do, say what we say and act how we act based on internal convictions we have based on the truth of God's

word or are we influenced by the external pressures around us? If ever there was a time that the world needed men and women of God who stood on the principles and truths of Scripture regardless of what anyone else said or thought, that time is now.

In our passage today, we're going to pick up the story of three of the young Jewish men we read about last week; Hananiah (who was called Shadrach), Mishael (who was called Meshach), and Azariah (who was called Abednego). As exiles ourselves, we have a lot learn from these three men when it comes to obeying the Lord when others are pressuring us to conform and compromise. Normally, I would have you stand with me as I read from God's Word, but today we're going to be walking through the passage a few verses at a time so you can remain seated. Having said that, turn with me if you would to Daniel ch. 3 as we look into the example these men set for us when it comes to obeying God when the world says we must conform to its way of thinking. [Read Dan. 3:8-12]

Now we dropped right into the middle of the action here so let me summarize what has happened from where we left off last week in Dan. 1 and the passage we just read. In Dan. 2, King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream of a statue made out of various types of precious metals and some clay and then rock was cut out of a mountain and it was thrown at the statue, smashing it to pieces. The dream troubled the king so he summoned all of his magicians and sorcerers to interpret the dream for him, but no one could. So Daniel was brought before the king and God gave him the ability to interpret the dream to which the king rewarded Daniel, and his three companions, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, with promotions and the king even recognized Daniel's God, Yahweh, as the "God of gods, the Lord of kings and the revealer of mysteries." (Dan. 2:47) Now, we know that this sudden recognition of who God is didn't affect King Nebuchadnezzar's heart because right away Ch. 3 begins with the King having a 90 ft golden statue of himself made out of gold and then, if that wasn't enough, he commanded that when the royal band started playing music everyone had to bow down and worship the image, making himself to be a god to receive his own glory.

Verse 7 tells us that after the statue was completed and the band struck up their tune, all the people, many of whom were Jewish exiles, fell down and began to worship the image the king had set up. Well, everyone except the three men we are talking about today. When all this went down, it put Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who were apparently present as the King's newly promoted advisors, in an uncomfortable position with a decision to make. They knew what the Law of God said concerning idolatry and they knew the consequences of what would happen to anyone who refused to bow down. When everyone else around them conformed and bent the knee, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego stood, come what may. This gave their enemies fodder if will to bring charges against them and gave them an opportunity to get rid of these Jewish men who had been placed above them. Remember, after Daniel interprets the king's dream, the king places Daniel on his court and grants Daniel's request to promote Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego as advisors over the affairs of Babylon which put them over the other officers who served under Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 2:49). This made the others furious and extremely jealous that these Jews, who were slaves of Babylon, had been promoted above them and so when they saw that these uncompromised Jewish men did not bow down to the image, they immediately report them to the king which is recorded for us in the verses that I already read this morning. They had two complaints in vs. 12 they reported to the King against these men. First, they said, "these men pay no attention to you." But this simply isn't true. If we recall what we learned last week from ch. 1, they took God at his word through his letter to Jeremiah the Prophet and they sought the "welfare of Babylon" and did everything to serve the

king faithfully and with integrity, only they had made up their mind that they would not defile themselves by disobeying the Law of God. The second accusation was the obvious, “they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.” This one was true, and just like with the food and wine from Daniel Ch. 1, they had already determined in their mind that they would not defile themselves by disobeying the Lord’s commands. One lesson we can learn from their example, is to already have your mind set that you are going to obey the Lord in a given situation before you end up in that situation. Get to know the Word of God and what he expects and commit yourselves to walk in his ways. It is far easier to make a stand when you have already committed to it than to find yourself in the midst of a situation at work, at school or anywhere else where you are tempted to compromise and you have nothing to stand on. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego made up their minds that they would do everything they could to be good citizens and help Babylon to flourish but drew their line in the sand, so to speak, when it meant going against the Law of God, and they had decided that was a line they would not cross. We should have the same mindset. Well let’s continue reading on and see how King Nebuchadnezzar responded to this report. [Read vs. 13-15]

Needless to say, King Nebuchadnezzar was not happy. In fact, the text says he was in a “furious rage.” Think about this for a second. There are probably thousands of people who were there that have bowed the knee and he is absolutely losing his mind over the fact that these three men didn’t and he has them brought before him. And when they stand before the king and he addresses them, but notice he drops the first accusation all together. The king knew that it wasn’t true, that these men had serve him and Babylon well and he immediately goes right to the point of the matter, “Is it true that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image I have set up?” And he continues, “If you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands.” Here he is giving them an opportunity to defend themselves and a chance for a do over when if gives them the choice to recant and bow before the image. But did you catch the last part of his statement to them before they have an opportunity to speak? “Who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?” He is so furious that these men won’t bow down to him that he pits himself against God as if he is on par with the God of universe. It seems as though he had forgotten that not that long ago God had shown himself more powerful than all the Babylonian gods put together when no one could interpret his dreams or help him in any way. Oh, but he was about to get a huge reminder. But before we get there, let’s read the response of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to the king and see what we can learn from them when we are tempted to compromise. [Read vs. 16-18]

First of all, their first response is, “We have no need to answer you in this matter.” In other words, “we don’t have anything to say.” They were admitting their guilt. They weren’t going to make excuses or try and get out of any consequences that came their way. They didn’t stage any protests or post on social media. They didn’t go on BNN and demand that they be heard (Babylonian News Network). They simply said to the king that we have nothing to say in our defense and admitted their guilt. But then they went on and gave King Nebuchadnezzar one of the greatest responses to trials that we face in all of scripture. You want to talk about how we live out our faith in exile, it’s committing this response to memory and applying it to our everyday lives. They said, “Our God is able to deliver us.” Whatever you face today, God is almighty and is able to deliver you from any trial that you face. Spiritual, physical, financial whatever it is, God is able to make you whole again. Then they said, “Our God will deliver us.” One way or another by miracle or by death, our God will deliver us out of the hands of the

enemy when he comes again and establishes his kingdom on earth. And thirdly, “But if not...” If God chooses not to deliver us this day by miracle, “we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image you have set up.” This is what we “young people” call a mic drop. No more needed to be said. Their faith was put into action and they simply said to the king, “Our God is greater than you and we would rather leave everything up to God and serve him, knowing that in his sovereignty and good purposes he might not rescue us from this fiery furnace and it might even mean our death, but we will not disobey God. Realize this, they could only exercise this type of faith because they had already committed to what we described earlier, in John MacArthur’s words, as internal principle. They had been taught the truth of God’s word and they had committed themselves to him and would not compromise no matter what the external pressures were. This should bring conviction to us. I know it does me. I think about all the times throughout my life when I didn’t do what was right because I didn’t want to be thought of as “weird” or “one of those crazy Christians,” and here these guys were, facing death by being burned alive and they were unwavering in their faith. This same faith has been, and is being, exercised all over the world by missionaries and Christians who have been beaten, tortured and even killed for their faith in Christ. May we look to them as our examples and be so committed to our faith in Jesus that we would be willing to die for it.

Let’s finish reading through vs. 27 this morning and see how this story ends. [Read vs. 19-27] We read here that the King was not pleased with the response of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Earlier, we read that he was in “furious rage” and here is “filled with [it]” and he orders the fiery furnace to be heated up seven times as hot as usual. On a side note, if you’ve ever wondered what a fiery furnace is and what was it doing there in the middle of this plain where the statue was set up, it was most likely the kiln that was used to make the bricks for the structure of the statue that was then layered on the outside with gold. So they figured they had a “hot and ready” mode of execution if they needed it handy. After the king orders the furnace heated up, he then orders some of his mighty men to throw the men into the furnace clothes and all. We get a glimpse as to how hot the furnace was when we read that those who threw the three men in were killed instantly because of the heat. Then something amazing happens. King Nebuchadnezzar looks in to make sure the deed is done but he sees something strange that he doesn’t even know how to describe it. [Read vs. 24-25]. Not only were they not burned up but they were in there walking around and there was a fourth person in there with them. Some will say that this is an appearance of Jesus in the Old Testament. I tend to agree with this assumption. Others say that it was an angel. Either way, God had miraculously delivered them from certain death and had visited them in the midst of the flames. When we make a stand for Jesus, he will be there by our side, as he always is, to walk with us through the fire. 1 Peter 4:14 says, “If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.”

After the king sees what’s going on, in his astonishment he calls for Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to come out of the furnace. After they walk out on their own, they are examined and it is quickly noticed that none of their clothing is burnt or singed and none of them even smell like smoke! And then something even more astonishing happens. King Nebuchadnezzar commended Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego for their faith, promoted them even high in the Province of Babylon and blessed their God for “no other god is able to deliver in this way.” (v. 29)

You and I will probably never face a literal fiery furnace. We will probably never have to make a real life or death decision in regards to our faith. But we will face many other trials by

fire in our lives. As Pastor Bruce mention last week, we have an enemy, Satan the deceiver. He seeks to steal, kill and destroy. He is the prince of the power of this world and seeks to deceive anyone and everyone he can in order to lead them astray and ultimately thwart the plan of God. He has deceived millions into chasing after things that promise everything but deliver nothing. And he especially wants to do the same with us, the children of God. Secondly, under the influence of Satan, the world is going to try to lure us and the world is going to persecute us. The world is going to try to force us to compromise. The world comes to us over and over again to call us to its idols. We want to be popular. We want to be famous. We want to be liked. We want to make money. We want to get a promotion. We want to get good grades. We want to win somebody over. We must make a commitment to obey God and make a stand and do what's right.

So, we're going to have trials: Some from Satan, the enemy of God. Some as a result on living in a world governed by sin, but in all of these the end result is that God is using these trials, meant for our harm, that we might be refined and grow in our faith and that we may stand courageous and uncompromising when we are being pressured to do otherwise. If we are going to obey God and walk in his ways and not be deceived by the promises of the enemy when the world says we must, it requires faith, faith in exile. Let us pray.