

Series: Facing the Heat
Message Title: ***Facing the Heat of Adversity***
Date: Sunday, July 22, 2018
Scripture: Daniel 3
Speaker: David H. McKinley
Location: Warren Baptist Church, Augusta, GA

Introduction

What does courage look like? Wizard of Oz... cowardly lion?

Faith is something we learn about in nice and comfortable gatherings like this one, but it's something we have to exercise and develop in the heated places of life.

One place we all “face the heat” is in moments of intimidation and adversity—in the face of adversaries and adverse circumstances. Trusting God can be a very lonely experience and learning to withstand intimidation and threat of shame can make cowards of us all.

I want to invite you to join me in the book of Daniel. This book is among the most intriguing and fascinating in the Old Testament. It is a book of historical significance telling of the people of Israel being forcibly taken in exile.

In 586 B.C. (following over 500 years of Jewish occupation and rule in Jerusalem), King Nebuchadnezzar besieged the city of Jerusalem, destroyed the walls of the city, and desecrated the Temple, taking both the artifacts of the Holy City and the people to Babylon. It was nearly 100 years until Cyrus allowed the Jews to return and rebuild (Nehemiah, Ezra).

Daniel is also a book of prophetic significance because it is interwoven with the events that transpired in that day while providing testimony of a day to come when God will fully and finally triumph over fallen kingdoms and wicked rulers of each age in the full and final consummation of His salvation in Christ. Daniel is called the "Apocalypse of the Old Testament," focusing on the 70 weeks of Daniel, kings and kingdoms, thrones and dominions.

Daniel is a book filled with the miracles—God's intervention and rule over and above the events of the rulers and kingdoms of this age. This book testifies to us that God is faithful to redeem and rescue His people in the face of adversity and opposition. God delivers!

No single event and story puts it all together better than the those we find facing the heat of adversity in Daniel 3.

“King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up” (Daniel 3:1-2 ESV).

“And the herald proclaimed aloud, ‘You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace.’ Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every

kind of music, all the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up... 'There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, pay no attention to you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up'" (Daniel 3:4-7, 12 ESV).

"Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, 'O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up'" (Daniel 3:16-18 ESV).

"Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, 'Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?' They answered and said to the king, 'True, O king.' 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’” (Daniel 3:24-25 ESV).

“Nebuchadnezzar answered and 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’” (Daniel 3:28 ESV).

Worship the image or else! This story of three Hebrew men (Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego) is not recorded and presented as a mythological tale, but rather a matter of historical significance.

God intervened to show His power, authority and rule in the affairs of men. And these men (when faced with adversity), would not bow, they would not bend, and they would not burn!

This is the challenge of faith. What do you do when your faith is challenged? Are you facing a faith-challenge in these days in life?

What can we learn from this story and this testimony today?



When Facing the Heat of Adversity:

1. Expect Your Faith to Be Challenged and Tested

"You have to stand alone."

Sadly, we so often expect faith to give us a "pass on pain" or a "get out of trouble free card" in life. But to the contrary, faith will be tested and will be challenged. How do I know? On what grounds do I say this? Read the Bible!

Over and over we see faith in the fire of the lives of believers. The heat of the furnace is normal, individual, providential and even needful.

"A faith that cannot be tested cannot be trusted."

I'd love to be able to preach a gospel about "your best life is now," but it simply is not true. There is much to face and to endure in this life.

Over and over the Scripture addresses the issue of trials, tests, temptations and terrors in the lives of God's people.

"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (James 1:2-4 ESV).

"In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ... Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you" (1 Peter 1:6-7; 4:12 ESV).

See 2 Corinthians 4:7-11.

We are specifically told we have an adversary—not Nebuchadnezzar, but Satan who seeks to devour and destroy your life and faith.

“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world” (1 Peter 5:8-9 ESV).

Notice the culmination of this command from the king: You have to fall down and worship. You can't just passively stand by, enjoy the music and then walk away. There is a moment when the challenge comes and it demands risk of obedience to God or willingness to go along with the crowd.

Warren Wiersbe makes a curious observation here, “The difference between the true believer and the unbeliever isn't the presence of faith, because everybody lives by faith in something. The difference is the object of that faith. The crowd believed the herald and the king, and therefore obeyed. The three Hebrew men believed the word and command of God so they disobeyed the king.”

I love that observation because as William James once said, “Faith is one of the forces men live by.”

Everyone lives by faith: elevator, fast food restaurant, automobile, plane, drive on highway, vows in marriage. We are all dependent beings. The crucial issue is the object of faith—who or what are you trusting in the trials and tests of life?

“There is no way to know who you really are until you’ve been tested.” —Timothy Keller

2. Tests of Faith Often Include Fear and Betrayal

The threat of the furnace of fire was the focus of fear—you will be burned! This was the driving force behind Nebuchadnezzar’s challenge.

I don’t know about you, but the intensity of the summer sun and heat is enough for me to know I don’t want to be burned.

Coercion and intimidation are tools used to try to diffuse and destroy faith—things we face as we try to walk others through their faith tests in life.

Connie has a niece, Brittany, who is 33 years old and mother of two children. In February,

there was a sudden paralysis of one side of her body and then a diagnosis of cancer—tumors in her head, liver, and lungs. It is a very difficult matter to discuss. She has asked for prayer and we are praying, but the hardest part is the way cancer keeps invading and intimidating. She has affirmed her faith and has been leaning hard on the Lord, but she recently wrote, "Cancer is cruel. It will take everything from you and more. It will just take and take and take."

The Bible is filled with "fear not" commands—approximately 365 (one for each day of the year). Why? Because fear is so often too great a challenge to our faith. So it is that fear that drives us away from commitment, contact and character.

Note how the initial resistance of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego was met with a "compromise"—just do it now and all is forgiven. But then came the rage and fury of Nebuchadnezzar—fire seven times hotter!

But let's talk about "betrayal." How did all of this get to the court of Nebuchadnezzar? See Daniel 3:12. Devious and jealous

servants of Babylon brought the report to Nebuchadnezzar. The fellow workers of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego betrayed them.

Informers in totalitarian states go hand in hand. One way Hitler held sway over his own countrymen and others was all related to getting people to “sell out” others. This was also true of Castro in Cuba, etc.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German Lutheran pastor who resisted Hitler’s aggression and was imprisoned. Bonhoeffer wrote the book, *The Cost of Discipleship*. He was hung April 9, 1945, in the midst of the collapse of Nazism. (May 8, 1945, surrender of war)

“There is hardly one of us who does not know what it is to be betrayed. The figure of Judas, which we used to find so difficult to understand is now fairly familiar to us. The air that we breathe is so polluted by mistrust that it almost chokes us... Our duty is to foster and strengthen confidence wherever we can. Trust will always be one of the greatest, rarest, and happiest blessings of our life in community, though it can emerge

only on the dark back-ground of a necessary mistrust.” —Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Fear and betrayal are motivations behind so many of the world’s commands for conformity—ostracized, imprisoned, tortured, shamed, and killed.

Betrayal is so deeply painful—friendship, marriage, work, money, family etc. And yet, God takes us in the ashes of broken trust and teaches us He is ever faithful and true!

3. True Faith Leads Us to Submission and Surrender

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego knew what they believed and what God required of them. They were willing to take a risk on obedience to God even though faced with a circumstance that gave them few outs or options.

They could not presume God’s wisdom or will for them in this. They could have reasoned, “We’ll bow our knees, but not our hearts. We can do our people more good by being officers in the king’s service than by being ashes in the king’s furnace.”

Note Daniel 3:17-18:

"If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up" (Daniel 3:17-18 ESV).

This is one of the most amazing testimonies of faith under fire: "Our God is able... but if not..."

"Faith is not necessarily the power to make things the way we want them to be; it is courage to face things as they are."

—Ron Dunn

This is such a vital statement for all of us today! Even if God does not deliver, we will not surrender to the worship of idols!

"There is no sin more seriously trounced in the Bible than the sin of idolatry. For idolatry is apostasy and apostasy is the betrayal of the true God." —D.S. Russell, *Daily Study Bible Series*

Idolatry is the substitution of the God who is revealed in His creation with the god of human imagination. In the end, we must obey the true and living God even if it is to face death.

See Matthew 10:16-18, 22

“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28 ESV).

“We still love life, but I do not think that death can take us by surprise now... It is we ourselves, and not the outward circumstances, who make death what it can be, a death freely and voluntarily accepted. Faithless vacillation, endless deliberation without action, refusal to take any risks—that is a real danger. I must be able to know for certain that I am in God’s hands and not men’s. Then anything becomes easy, even the severest privation. No earthly power can touch us without His will, and the danger and distress can only drive us closer to Him...Christ not only makes people ‘good,’ He makes them strong too.”

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer

4. God is Always Faithful and True

Note what happened in the furnace. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were not alone! It's the most unbelievable and incredible thing—God brought deliverance and restoration.

Instead of these men bowing the knee to the idol, they walked with the God who preserves in the fire.

“But now thus says the LORD, He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, O Israel: ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior” (Isaiah 43:1-3a ESV).

God's word to Israel. God's promise to His people.

Note the description: "a son of the gods."
We know that God has revealed His nearness in His Son, Jesus Christ. (theophany) Here we can debate all the issues of what happened in the flames, but I can tell you Jesus is the Deliverer and Restorer of our souls. Jesus is the One who steps in to deliver sinners from the evil of this present age! God came near in Christ for us! 12:27 (not even smell the smoke) See Romans 8:1-2.

It is out of apparent defeat that victory comes, and in the heat of affliction the One who bore more hurt and heat than any man comes to meet us and leads us to deliverance and restoration.

"Nebuchadnezzar answered and 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'"
(Daniel 3:28 ESV).

It's not Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego bowing; it is Nebuchadnezzar confessing the

grace and glory of our great God—as well as all the kings of the earth one day.

What a story! And yet it is not just ancient words (though given and written long ago). It is the on-going work of God's grace and love that casts out fear even today.