

## Faith in Action

## Daniel Chapter 3

Good morning! Before I get to today's message, I want to clarify about something that I spoke about last week. If you remember I spoke about prayer and addressing God as our Father as we pray. After the service I had some people talk to me about issues they have with their earthly father and how it makes it difficult for them to view God as a father figure. I can understand what they are saying and where they are coming from. My father and I have not always seen eye to eye and that has caused friction at times in our relationship. I understand that it can make it difficult to see God as a father. The fact is, we *can* have a relationship with our father who is in heaven without all the baggage that can come with earthly relationships. God as our father loves us unconditionally and wants us to see him as a loving father. We need to learn how to not transfer feelings for our earthly father and project them on to God. We need to see God for who *He* is and not see him as our earthly father. I'm not standing here saying that is easy, because it's not. In recognizing that you may have difficulties in seeing God as a Father due to your earthly relationship is a step in the right direction.

I want to start by telling you a story about faith in action. One night a house catches on fire. The family all escapes out to the front yard except for one young boy. He had to go to the house to escape the flames. His dad sees him standing on the roof and calls for him to jump down to him. The dad yells, "Jump, I'll catch you!" The boy says, "There is too much smoke and too many flames. I can't see you." The dad says back to him, "But I can see you." The boy jumps from the roof and the dad catches him. The boy jumped because he knew his dad was trustworthy. He knew his dad would catch him. This young boy, he demonstrated faith by the way he acted. In the Christian community faith is one of the subjects we talk a lot about. Today I want to use a famous story in the Bible to talk about faith in action. I want us to become people who have faith in God no matter the outcome. No matter what happens in life.

Our story today is found in Daniel 3. This is the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who were Jewish men that were sent to Babylon as captives. Now if you grew up in church and went to Sunday school I am sure you have probably heard this story many times. As we look at this story I want you to listen with fresh ears and new eyes. By the end of the story I want you to see that these were men of faith and that they were willing to trust God no matter the outcome.

**DANIEL 3:1-7** King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, sixty cubits high and six cubits wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.

<sup>2</sup> He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up.

<sup>3</sup> So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it.

<sup>4</sup> Then the herald loudly proclaimed, "Nations and peoples of every language, this is what you are commanded to do:

<sup>5</sup> As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.

<sup>6</sup> Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.”

<sup>7</sup> Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the nations and peoples of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

In these first 7 verses, we read how King Nebuchadnezzar has this big golden statue made. This is a really big statue because it stands 27 meters tall and was 2.7 meters wide. These dimensions make the statue seem tall and thin. Some scholars believe the width actually represents the thickness of the statue. We don't know what the statue image was whether it was the image of the king or one of the Babylonian gods. In either case the king calls for all of the officials in the kingdom to come to the dedication of the statute. The Bible tells us that all the officials from the kingdom come and they are going to hear a message from the King. These officials included Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. At this dedication they stand before the statue and hear this command before the king. The king says that any time they hear this music being played they are to stop whatever they are doing and bow down and worship the statue. There is a punishment if you chose to not obey. If you chose to ignore the command, you will be put to death. This death was not going to be an ordinary death either. It was death from being thrown into a fiery furnace. After this dedication ceremony the officials take the message back to their people and when the people heard the music they all bowed down and worshiped this statue.

Some people have a bad idea about what faith is. I want to share this story that I read when I was preparing for this message. This story illustrates bad faith. In their book, We Let Our Son Die, Larry and Lucy Parker retell a story about their misguided faith. Larry and his wife paint a picture of how they had come to believe that if they had just enough faith God would heal their diabetic son. It came to the point where their son got ill and needed insulin. Believing that God would heal their son they refused to give him the insulin. Eventually their son went into a diabetic coma. Larry and Lucy Parker were warned by some people that they just needed to have enough faith and that they needed to believe that God would heal their son. These people told them that they just needed to have more and more faith. Unfortunately, their son died. But even after his death the Parkers continued in their faith. They conducted a resurrection service instead of a funeral service. In fact for more than a year following his death, they refused to abandon their firmly held faith that their son, like Jesus, would rise from the dead. Eventually both Larry and Lucy, were tried and convicted of manslaughter and were sent to prison. These people had the wrong idea of what faith is. They believed that they just needed to believe harder or stronger and God would heal their son.

Let's continue reading our story in

**Daniel 3:8-30** <sup>8</sup> At this time some astrologers <sup>[a]</sup> came forward and denounced the Jews. <sup>9</sup> They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, “May the king live forever!

<sup>10</sup> Your Majesty has issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, <sup>11</sup> and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace.

<sup>12</sup> But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up.”

<sup>13</sup> Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king,

<sup>14</sup> and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve

my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up?

<sup>15</sup> Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?"

<sup>16</sup> Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, "King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. <sup>17</sup> If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us<sup>[b]</sup> from Your Majesty's hand.

<sup>18</sup> 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."

<sup>19</sup> Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seventimes hotter than usual

<sup>20</sup> and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. <sup>21</sup> So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace.

<sup>22</sup> 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, <sup>23</sup> and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

<sup>24</sup> 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."

<sup>25</sup> 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."

<sup>26</sup> 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,

<sup>27</sup> 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.

<sup>28</sup> 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.

<sup>29</sup> Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way."

<sup>30</sup> Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

The rest of the story demonstrates what real faith is. Some men went to the king and were tattling to him that there were certain Jews who were refusing to bow down and worship the king's statue. These men thought it would be a good idea to remind the king of his rule. They said to the king, "Didn't you say that if they didn't bow down to the statue that they would be thrown into the furnace?" I don't know why these men were so against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Maybe they just didn't like them because they

were Jewish and had become important to the king. In any case, they felt the need to remind the king that these men were being disobedient. When the king hears this he becomes furious. He orders that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego come and stand before him. I don't know about you but standing before a furious king isn't my idea of a perfect Saturday afternoon. The king asks Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego if what he has heard is true. The king wanted to hear it from them. He wanted to get to the truth of the matter. Instead of just believing the rumors, he went straight to the source. He asked them, "Do you refuse to bow before my statue?" Being the nice king that he is he tells them that he is going to give them one last chance to obey the command with this warning, "If you don't obey, I will have you thrown into the fire straight away."

I want you to notice their response in

**verses 16-18** <sup>16</sup> Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, "King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. <sup>17</sup> If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us<sup>[b]</sup> from Your Majesty's hand.

<sup>18</sup> 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."

Notice that they didn't claim that God was bigger than the fire and that he would save them from the fire. They didn't claim that their great faith in God would save them. They knew that God was able to save them if he wanted to and they even said, "God is able to save us but even if he doesn't we will still serve and obey him." Basically they were saying this, "We don't know what will happen to us. The only thing that we know is that we trust God and that we will obey Him." This makes the king even angrier. Bible says that he was filled with fury and the expression of his face was changed against them. I think deep down the king wanted to save Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego but their firm faith in God makes the king angry. He orders the furnace to be heated seven times hotter than normal. In other words he said make the furnace as hot as we can possibly make it. Then he orders his strong men to tie Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego up in ropes. Then he orders them to take them and throw them into the fire. Remember this fire is super-heated. It is super-hot right now. As the strong men go to throw them into the fire, the strong men die from the heat. Yet, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are unhurt. In fact, the king looks into the fire and he sees them walking around! He calls over his advisors and he wants to know why there are four men in the fire when they threw three men into the fire. The king goes close to the fire and he calls for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to come out of the fire. He sees that their clothes are not burned. They don't even smell like smoke. The king recognizes that God is the most high God. This is what the king has to say in **verse 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.**

The king recognized their trust and willingness to obey God even if it cost them their life. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego knew that it was more important to obey God and serve God than to keep their life by disobeying God's command to not worship other gods.

Do you want to have this kind of faith in God? Faith that says no matter the cost, I will trust in God. In order to have that kind of faith, we first need to understand what faith is not. I want to give you two things that faith is not. These ideas are not my own original ideas. They are a combination of ideas I have read this week and from other pastors.

Number 1, **Faith is not reliance in faith itself. In other words, faith is not faith in faith.** Sometimes we have this idea that we just need to believe more in order to have the proper amount of faith. Like the

parents in the story I told you earlier, they thought that if they just believed more than their son would be healed. They thought it was their lack of faith that was preventing their son from being healed. We can fall into that trap too. We think ok, if I just have a little more faith or if I believe just that much more that God will answer our prayer. We think that if we are positive in our thinking than we will get the outcome that we desire. We go through this elaborate ritual of praying and reading our Bible and we tell ourselves and try to convince ourselves that there can be no doubt in our mind or our faith is not strong enough. **This is not faith in God as much as it is confidence in our own ability to believe enough to convince God to give us what we want.** Let me say that again. This is important and I want you to get this. **This is not faith in God as much as it is confidence in our own ability to believe enough to convince God to give us what we want.** With the parents in the story I told you, they had confidence in their ability to convince God to heal their son. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not have faith in faith itself. They were not counting on their own ability to believe enough in God to save them. They were trusting God *alone* to save them. This is why they were able to say no matter what happens in that fire, they knew that God is in control.

Number 2, **Faith is not confidence in what we would like to take place or what we would like to have happen.** Maybe you have gotten to the point in your life where you don't have faith in faith itself. You know that your confidence should only be in God. Yet, it is still possible for you to have the wrong kind of faith. It is possible for you to think that God should do what you think He should do. You think there is something that God should be doing and that thing might even be a good thing or a spiritual thing. The problem with that kind of thinking or that kind of faith is that it is *your* idea of what should be happening and not God's. You believe that God is going to give you that new job, that better paying job because if He does then you will be able to give more money to the church and that is a good thing. So you trust in that. You believe that because it is a good thing to give money to the church that God will give you that new job that pays more money so that you *can* give more. Because this is going to give honor and glory to God, He should and will do it. **In other words, we think we can get God to act a certain way because we believe and trust in Him.** Let me repeat that. **We think we can get God to act a certain way because we believe and trust in Him.** The problem with this kind of thinking is that we think we can get whatever we want from God because we believe that God will give it to us.

Here's a story. Jim Conway is a pastor who believes in God and God's love. At one point in his life he had the kind of faith that we were talking about just now. He thought that he could get God to give him what *he* wanted because it was a good thing. His daughter was diagnosed with cancer and the doctor said that they would need to amputate her leg in order to save her life. Naturally Jim was disappointed in this news. He found it hard to believe that God would allow this to happen to his daughter. At the same time, Jim believed in a God that could do miracles and who was a God of healing. Deep in his heart he believed that God would use the healing of his daughter as a testimony of God's love. Jim convinced all the other family members that God was going to heal his daughter because God was going to use it as a testimony. The day of the surgery came and Jim asked the daughter to check his daughter's leg one last time. Jim believed that God had healed his daughter and that the surgeon would be astounded by this healing and believe in God's love. As the doctor went to check his daughter, Jim and his family gathered together in anticipation of her healing. The family had faith in what *they* wanted to have happen. When the surgeon came back into the waiting room, Jim could see it on his face the healing did not happen. Jim ran from the room and he hid in the basement of the hospital crying. He was pounding on the wall crying out to God saying, "Why didn't you heal my daughter! I had faith!" He had felt as if God had abandoned him in his time of need. In his grief he went back to the Bible and he realized that the faith that he had was not biblical faith. He realized he was trying to make God act a certain way when he should have been relying on God to do what God was going to do. Sometimes God doesn't make sense to us here on earth. Here's the

thing, God doesn't think like we do. For us everything is about our lives on earth but God thinks about things in an eternal way. We don't always understand why God works the way that he does, all we can do is trust that he is thinking of our best interests and the best interest of our children and the best interest of the people we have never even met. We don't know what God knows so we just need to trust that he loves us and that he is doing his best for us. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not have faith that said God should act in a certain way. They didn't say, "Hey, God we are obeying you. We aren't bowing down to this statue so you better save us from the fire." Their faith was trust in God, *not* in what they wanted to have happen.

Biblical faith is trust in God alone. It really is that simple. There is nothing fancy to it. It is just trusting in God alone. Our story from the Bible today shows us that faith is not just trust in a certain set of beliefs. It shows us that faith is not belief in what we want to have happen, no matter how good that desire is. Hebrews 11 is a chapter full of stories about faith. Each person mentioned in this chapter had faith in God alone. These people are examples of biblical faith. They let God be God. **In Hebrews 11:8-9,** <sup>8</sup> By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. <sup>9</sup> By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise.

Abraham had faith in God. God told him to go and he went not even knowing where he was going. Even Jesus had biblical faith. **Mark 14:36,** Jesus was in the garden praying and he said, "*Abba, Father,*" he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." Jesus wanted the cup of death to pass from him but his faith was not in that desire. His faith was in God and knowing that God had the best plan in mind. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego rested in the fact that God is God and that they could trust Him no matter what happened. In conclusion, I want to say this. The testing of our faith comes when God says no. At that time we feel like God is not answering our prayer, that our prayers have gone unanswered. The problem with this phrase, 'unanswered prayer' is that it isn't very accurate. God listens to every word that we say. He answers every prayer. It's just that sometimes he answers no or maybe you are praying for a no and he answers yes. We have to realize that sometimes his answer is different than what we want or think we need. It is at this time that our faith is tested. Do we still trust God even when he gives us an answer we don't like? Does our faith stand strong no matter the circumstances in our life? Will you stand with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and say, "No matter what happens, I will trust in God alone." Let's pray.