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Favorite Stories From The Bible:

The Fiery Furnace

Nate Schofield

West Valley Presbyterian Church

Scripture: Daniel 3:13-18

Pray:

Spoiler alert: Now, if you're one of those people who record sporting events, and run home to watch them, hoping no one has spoiled the outcome, you may not want to listen for just a second. If you've never read the rest of this story, and you want to be surprised, don't listen for the next 15 seconds. Okay, here's the rest of the story. God protects the three men, and they are delivered from the fire.

I think every time I've read this story, that's what I focus on. It's always been an incredible story of God's protection. But today I want to talk about something else.

To understand what's going on a little better, let's go back a little bit.

After the prosperity under King David, and King Solomon, the kingdom was divided: Israel in the north, and Judah to the south.

Let me give you an example of some of the kings in that time:

- King Omri in 1 Kings chapter 16: “But Omri did evil in the eyes of the LORD...” (1 Kings 16:25a)
- “Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the LROD than any of those before him.” (1 Kings 16:30)
 - “...and began to serve Baal and worship him. He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria.” (1 Kings 16:31-32)
- In reference to Ahaziah, Ahab’s son, after saying he did evil in the eyes of the LORD, scripture elaborates with, “He served and worshiped Baal and provoked the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger, just as his father had done.” (1 Kings 22:27)

Are we beginning to see a pattern? Despite warnings from prophets such as Elijah, Jonah, and Amos the kings continued to, “Do what is evil in the eyes of the LORD.”

In fact, as you read through 1 and 2 Kings, and Chronicles, you see this phrase over and over, “did evil in the eyes of the LORD.” It appears more than 50 times in the Old Testament texts. And in many of these examples, it’s accompanied with a description of what is evil: usually the construction of idols and altars to false gods such a Baal.

Eventually, the northern kingdom of Israel falls to Assyria in 718 BC.

And despite a few kings in the south, such as Asa and Josiah who did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, the rest well...you guessed it, built altars, and worshiped idols and did what was, “Evil in the eyes of the LORD.”

Ultimately, in 586 BC, Judah, the southern kingdom fell to King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians.

So King Nebuchadnezzar orders the deportation of all the best and brightest men, out of Judah. The scripture says King Nebuchadnezzar order the deportation of:

“Young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king’s palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians.” (Daniel 1:4)

Being young, able bodied, handsome men, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah found themselves in a new land, learning a new language and way of life. They were even given new Babylonian names: Belteshashazzar, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

These men had grown up in Judah, and we know they were devout Jews. They would have known the law, and committed it to their hearts. We have evidence of this in the first chapter of Daniel, when they are first brought into Babylon, they were given food “from the king’s table.” The scripture says, “But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way.” (Daniel 1:8) Out of all of the men in Babylon,

Daniel, and his 3 friends were resolved to follow God's commands, even dietary law.

And because God was with them, and gave them wisdom and understanding beyond all the astrologers in Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar eventually promotes Daniel to be the ruler over the entire province of Babylon (Daniel 2:48), and at Daniel's request, his 3 friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are made administrators over Babylon, therefore Daniel stays in the royal court.

Finally, we come to today's story. King Nebuchadnezzar builds an enormous golden idol. Let me say that again, King Nebuchadnezzar builds an enormous golden idol...and he calls all the officials in the area together for the dedication. It is announced that whenever the music plays, everyone is to bow down and worship this golden idol.

Do you see where I'm going with this?

- Build, and worship idols = BAD
- Tear down idols, and worship Yahweh only = Good

So here are these three men, in a foreign land, with foreign names, high officials to the king, (did I mention that they were smart, good looking, and in good shape?)

More importantly, devout followers of Yahweh, the God of Israel. And here they are, told to bow down to a foreign idol, or be thrown in a fiery furnace.

Time out...side note...Any fans of Survivor here? I think I've seen maybe 3 episodes of the show...total. I didn't really get into it. On day 17 in the 2nd season, Michael from the Kucha tribe fell into the fire, and suffered 3rd degree burns...causing him to be evacuated, ending his Survivor career for that season. This was the fire that was famous that season for over cooking rice. I think there was some drama over that... Anyway, a fire that's hot enough to overcook rice, caused 3rd degree burns, and sent a modern day survivor contestant home.

In the 6th century BC, a furnace wouldn't have been your ordinary camp fire. It would have been an iron smelting furnace. A furnace used

to melt iron. I wouldn't really want to be thrown into any fire, even a fire for cooking rice, but a fire that is hot enough to melt iron...

But despite the threat of being thrown into the fire, they've studied God's law, and they refuse to bow down.

Then there were these astrologers. I can almost picture the astrologers here. The astrologers were men who made their living interpreting the "stars" for the king. But remember, God was with these men and gave them wisdom and understanding beyond all the astrologers in Babylon. In Daniel Chapter 1, it states that:

"In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanterers in his whole kingdom."

As long as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were around, the astrologers (who would be included in the magician and enchanter category) were essentially out of work. They must have hated them!

Here was there chance...King Nebuchadnezzar, King
Nebuchadnezzar...they didn't bow down!

Here we get a real look into King Nebuchadnezzar.

“Furious with rage, he summons Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.”

Let me paraphrase here just a bit... He called them in and said, “really? Really? You didn’t bow down? Maybe you didn’t hear me...I said when you hear the music, you are to bow down to the idol I built, or you’ll be thrown in the fire.” Oh the hubris!...It’s almost jumping off the page!

The king is so used to everyone following his commands every time he speaks...he just can’t believe that someone would disobey him.

Let me continue (once again, this is my paraphrase, not a direct quote). “Really? You didn’t bow down? Maybe you didn’t hear me...I said when you hear the music, you are to bow down to the idol I built, or you’ll be thrown in the fire. Here’s your chance, I’ll have the music start again, and you can bow down...**OR YOU WILL BE THROWN IN THE BLAZING FURNACE!”**

Okay, direct quote here, no paraphrase... “Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?” (Daniel 3:15b)

You can hear the arrogance! Notice, he doesn't say, what god can save you from the furnace...he says my hand. He is implying to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that he is greater, and more powerful than any god.

They reply to him, “O 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 save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king.”

But we can't stop here...the next verse is the one that gives me goose-bumps, that truly blows my mind.

“...the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of god you have set up.”

“But even if he does not...we will not serve your gods.”

These three men have faith...faith and guts. You see, they know what will happen when they refuse to bow down. They WILL be thrown in the furnace. They have faith that God will protect them, but even if He doesn't...If God's will is not to protect them, they would rather burn than to bow down to the idol build by the king.

As we've already established, these men were devout followers of The one true God. They had studied God's law.

They would have been very familiar with the Shema. A common Jewish prayer, which comes from Deuteronomy 6:4-5, "Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." Out of the entire Torah, they knew, the most important command from God, was simply put God first in all things. Worship God, only.

This lesson comes back throughout the Bible. Fast forward 600 years from King Nebuchadnezzar. The Pharisees tried to test Jesus, and they asked him,

"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your

soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment’ ” (Matthew 22:36-38).

Jesus himself, the Son of God, who came that we may be reconciled with our Father, Creator, God said, the greatest commandment is to Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind.

Now, I already told you, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were saved from the fire. It was a glorious miracle. But think of the faith they must have had. Staring at the king...

“But even if he doesn’t, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

Build idols = Bad = Evil in the eyes of the LORD

Tear down idols, worship God = Good = right in the eyes of the LORD

I know there may be people here today, who feel like they are in the fire. You might be sitting there today feeling like you are facing a

fiery furnace in the near future, or maybe you are in it. We pray today, that if you're in a furnace, God sends his angels to protect you. We pray that you are delivered from the fires of the furnace.

But before we are delivered from the furnace...before you're thrown into the furnace, I want to challenge everyone here today to think about what idols are standing in your way. What idols have you built in your life...what idols have been built before you, that your boss built, or your friends or your family has built that are keeping you from the one true God.

In just a few moments we're going to welcome Reverend Harvey up to administer communion. And as you hold the bread in your hand... as you drink from the cup, take a moment to think of the idols in your life keeping you from the LORD. Maybe it's something at work... something in your job, your finances, a car, the new softball bat I've been looking at over at Sport's Authority. Or maybe it's in your relationship. We put so many things up on pedestals, and often it turns to worship. I challenge you today, let go of your idols, love the LORD your God, with all of your heart, all of your soul and all of your mind...

PRAY: