

STUDY ON THE LIFE OF DANIEL

“Standing For God’s Glory”

Daniel 3:13-18

STUDY (8)



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“STANDING FOR GOD’S GLORY” – A Study of the Life of Daniel

(Daniel 3:13-18)

The tension is now palpable as these young men have declared that they will not bow to the idols of Babylon. The one thing that is non-negotiable in Babylon is their faith. They discerned that the king’s command was more than a mere social courtesy but an act of spiritual faith. If your heart has already bowed in submission to the King of kings then the threats of any mortal monarch will not intimidate you. Fear of death played no part in their unshakeable and unchangeable conviction. These young men had demonstrated that they would not bow in v1-12, but now they have to show that they would not bend for their faith. They could not be bought for any price! That is why we still talk about their faith 2,500 years later. Pritchard notes of these three young giants in the faith,

They knew it was better to die a thousand times with God’s approval than to live one day without it. Better a fiery furnace than to live with the fire of a guilty conscience burning in your soul. They could die, but they dare not sin! Their convictions were not for sale. Not at any price, not even their own lives.

The world is anxious for us to conform to their idols. They will try sweet persuasiveness or outright intimidation to force their agenda on us. Strict conformity to God’s Word will always have consequences. It is hard to stand alone as “unBabylonian” when everyone around you is capitulating. However, Daniel proved in chapter one that strong internal convictions empowered by the Spirit of God can withstand any external pressures. True faith does not look for loopholes. This is equally true for us all. John MacArthur points out,

Our decisions, our attitudes and our behaviors are determined by one of two things: external pressure, or internal principle...the battle is going on all the time in our lives between these two conflicting items. And we’re very good at self-justification so a lot of times when we succumb to external pressure we define it as internal principle. But basically we have to come down to that bottom line. Do we do what we do, say what we say and act the way we act because we have convictions about it or because we feel the pressure from the outside? Are our convictions altered by pressures brought to bear upon us?

Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Then they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands? (v13-15)

The inspired writer uses two synonyms, “*rage and fury*” to convey the explosive anger of the proud and volatile monarch. He may have conquered the known world but like all men he has not conquered himself. In fairness, the king does then pause long enough to check out the facts with the 3 young Hebrew men. He does not rely on hearsay. It may be the sight of them and their usefulness to him checked his passion momentarily. However, his pride would not allow him to exonerate their first refusal.

The devil applies further pressure with the recantation offer by the king. He is willing to strike up the royal orchestra again for a final opportunity. This was more than an act of mercy,

but a further avenue of testing. If they just bow, then it will be, “*well*.” The king will just look at it as an unfortunate misunderstanding. Very few men would receive a second chance in defying Nebuchadnezzar. You can almost hear the devil whispering to them that they had taken their stand and now was the time to submit. Indeed, God had intervened to give them a second chance so they should not waste the opportunity by a pointless gesture of defiance. To die like this was simply to play into the hands of the jealous Chaldeans. The king clearly respected them in wanting them to live. Indeed, he would realize now that this was a difficult thing for them to do so would respect them and their faith more than it allowed them to show regard for his person. Or you could hear the old serpent whisper that an idol is nothing and idolatry is when you worship the statue believing it is divine. Whereas they knew the idol is impotent so bowing to an impotent nothing is not idolatry. Surely, they could honour God by praying to Him as they bowed down. There are professing evangelicals who rationalize this way today.

If the carrot approach did not work, the king set out the stick ultimatum, “*but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.*” The pride of Nebuchadnezzar would not allow him to lose face. Just to add to their fear, he insolently declares his power, “*who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?*” Even though the king discerned this was a test of spiritual power, Nebuchadnezzar now saw the subordination of Jehovah’s power to deliver to the power of “*my hands.*” So quickly the king had forgotten his previous confession in Daniel 2:47, “*Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings.*” Pride makes fools of those who ignore the demonstration of God’s power to them previously. The king would soon find out this God is able to deliver His people!

This temptation to recant after they had been given another opportunity to re-evaluate and rationalize the situation was powerful. Spurgeon put it well,

We can imagine the enormous pressure on Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to compromise. Everything in front of them - the king, the furnace, the music, their compatriots, their competitors - all of it conspired to convince them to compromise. Yet God was more real to them than any of those things. “Do not judge the situation by the king’s threat and by the heat of the burning fiery furnace, but by the everlasting God and the eternal life which awaits you. Let not flute, harp, and sackbut fascinate you, but hearken to the music of the glorified. Men frown at you, but you can see God smiling on you, and so you are not moved.

This tactic of intimidation has worked with some of the finest of God’s children. Even the bold monk, Luther asked for a night to pray whether he should recant. Archbishop Cranmer (1489 –1556) was a leader of the English Reformation and Archbishop of Canterbury. During the reign of the Roman Catholic queen, Mary I he was tried for treason and heresy. Under threat of being burned he made several recantations. However, in sorrow he finally withdrew his recantation and vowed the hand that had signed the recantation document would burn first. This he did before dying in the flames in 1556. Would these valiant young men witness a good confession at the second opportunity?

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. (v16-18)

Times of public temptation are times of public witness for the Lord's glory. The irresistible force of Nebuchadnezzar was now going to meet three immovable objects. He would see three outstanding witnesses of men who feared God more than him. They knew that a sovereign God had ordained the test of the fiery furnace but they made no claims to understanding why. There is a tendency to overlook in these verses that these men did not know the eventual outcome of chapter three. As they look at the intimidating monarch there is a very real possibility that they will die horrific deaths in the furnace. Trusting God is easy when things are going well, but not when we are staring into a burning fiery furnace.

These three verses contain the only recorded words of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. But these few sentences reveal much about the character and faith of these men. There is no indication that they did this proudly or rebelliously, "*we are not careful to answer thee in this matter.*" They do not pause to debate the issue with the devil as to what course would be best for their careers. Nor do they try to apologize, evade, divert or even dialogue with their monarch as to reaching a compromise arrangement. Their testimony was unflinching and unwavering.

Humanly speaking, their chances of survival were nigh impossible. These next few moments would chart the rest of their life and out into eternity. Yet, the three speak as one voice as their convictions were identical and fixed. Their words reveal that they had their theology straight. They respected the king as God's ordained servant but they knew that his authority was from God and as such was limited by God's revealed Word (cf. Acts 5:29; Romans 13:1-2). Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego knew 3 important truths:

(1) Jehovah was their God not Nebuchadnezzar – they confess up front, "*our God whom we serve.*" Jehovah was their God in Babylon, as well as in Jerusalem. His jurisdiction was not limited to the borders of the Promised Land. If the choice is between pleasing the King of kings or an earthly monarch, then there is only one conclusion they will reach.

(2) Jehovah was sovereign not Nebuchadnezzar – they make the point clearly by affirming, "*our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace.*" They did not know "how" He might deliver them, but they had absolute confidence that He could. The same spirit is reminiscent of Paul as he face martyrdom, "*For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day*" (2 Timothy 1:12). No doubt Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego knew how God had delivered Israel in the past in days of extremity such as at the Red Sea. They also had the personal experience of seeing God undertake for them when they stood for Him in Daniel 1 over the dietary laws and in chapter two in the dream context.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego humbly do not presume on God's sovereign will as they were willing to bow to His decision. They knew He could deliver but they did not presume that He would. Three words summarise their submission to His sovereignty, "*But if not.*" To them, God was not some personal genie that appeared from a bottle bound to do their bidding to deliver them. They were willing to do right and leave the consequences to Him, as His decree might be different than their desires. Like Job they could say, "*Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him: but I will maintain mine own ways before Him*" (Job 13:15). Their faith was not in their temporal deliverance, but their faith was in their God. We all need to affirm with the Psalmist, "*But our God is in the heavens: He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased*" (Psalm 115:3). In 1675 Samuel Rodigast summed this up in his wonderful hymn,

*What e'er my God ordains is right:
His holy will abideth;
I will be still what e'er He doth;
And follow where He guideth:
He is my God: though dark my road,
He holds me that I shall not fall:
Wherefore to Him I leave it all.*

All too often believers try to bargain with God when faced with tests that have stark consequences if we do right. We are not to try to back God into a corner with a “commercial faith” of promised blessing before we decide to obey His revealed Word. True biblical faith is trusting God regardless of the outward results. He controls the consequences, but the duty is ours. Even if we lose everything on this earth for standing for the Lord, to gain immediate glory is a greater reward as, “*a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth*” (Luke 12:15).

(3) Jehovah demanded absolute worship and would not share this glory with others, “*be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.*” By these words, these young men prove that they knew the Bible forbade idolatry to any other God. They would have been aware that idolatry was one of the principal reasons for the judgment of the captivity (2 Chronicles 36:14-16).

It is this type of applied doctrine that made these men great. They did not try to hide their faith, but lived it! It is not faith that is powerful but the object of that faith in God’s promises and character. Faith must be accompanied by absolute obedience to the Word, as obedience is the necessary corollary of faith. These three young men had gone as far as they could to accommodate the wishes of the king. Now, there is nothing left for them to do but stand on the Word of God and let the storm buffet them. They will now discover that man’s extremity is merely God’s opportunity to show Himself strong.

CONCLUSION

In this ordeal we see a perfect picture of Christian testing. Your knowledge and regard of God is the best antidote to overcome the paralyzing fear of man, as “*the righteous are bold as a lion*” (Proverbs 28:1). Knowing what God has done in the past, strengthens our faith to believe He could do it in the present. As John Calvin points out, “Nothing is more powerful to overcome temptation than the fear of God.” All of us have to face death at some point. It is better to do so walking by faith in martyrdom with the world against you than living by sight with the world applauding you into eternity. MacArthur typically sums this up well,

They knew that what happened to their bodies was not the issue but that their soul had to be riveted on the truth of God. This is for us, people, an uncompromising life that will not bow to any idol no matter what the cost, the idol of popularity, the idol of comfort, the idol of fame, the idol of respectability in the world, none of those idols can make us bow. There is no compromise for one who stands like this. God is just as good when He doesn’t heal as He is when He does. God is just as loving when He doesn’t provide all that we think we need as when He does. God is just as gracious when He says no as He is when He says yes. God is God and God is to be uncompromisingly worshiped and what He does is His business. You might sum it up by saying: In God’s case, death is as

good as life. Right? Paul said it, “For to me to live is Christ and to die is...what?...gain.” Death never put any fear in his heart. Death never forced him to compromise. He put his head one day on a block and an axehead flashed in the sun and severed it from his body and he never flinched and compromised.

Our loyalty to God’s Word is fickle. We compromise all too easily. Often it begins with just a little gesture of disobedience to what we know is right. The reason we feel uncomfortable as we read this story is because we are already bowing to the gods of this world. We fell at the first sound of the music. Peer pressure overcomes us at the first threat. We want the gods of popularity, fame, wealth, status etc. So we just compromise to get ahead which renders our testimony ineffective and diminishes our power with God. Many of us think, look, and act like the Babylonians around us.

Faithfulness does not keep us from the crises of life. The heroic words of three young Hebrews alone in Babylon speak comfort across the centuries to us today. They had a big view of a great God. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego prove that we don’t have to walk the path of compromise. They lived for God in the smaller matters of their diet in Daniel 1 and this enabled them to stand for Him in the larger matters on the bigger stage on the plains of Dura in Daniel 3. We need a living faith that cannot be threatened or intimidated by the world, which does not give in to external pressure. Ray Pritchard makes a valid observation,

The only power the king had over them was the power of death, and since they weren’t afraid to die, he had no power at all. He couldn’t intimidate them because they were ready to die if need be. What can you do with men like that?”

As you read this story of past obedience, put yourself in the shoes of these three young men. Would you have capitulated? Are you capitulating now? Remember a little compromise is still a compromise! This story is not written to entertain you, but to convict and encourage you to stand today, “*For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope*” (Romans 15:4).

*Stand up, stand up for Jesus, ye soldiers of the cross;
Lift high His royal banner, it must not suffer loss.
From victory unto victory His army shall He lead,
Till every foe is vanquished, and Christ is Lord indeed.*

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why does the world want us to conform to their values? Have you experienced this pressure?

2. What do you do when the pressure is on to bow to the world's values?

3. What doctrinal truths enabled these three young men to stand for God?

4. How have you been challenged by this incident?
