

Faith in the Fire (Daniel 3:1-30)

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Preacher: Josh Lorenz

[0 : 0 0] Amen. Thank you, Youth Praise Band. To just get up here and do this in front of the youth is already scary to do in front of the entire church. There's just so much more, the courage you have to do this. Just good job, guys.

Children, you may now go with Miss Savannah to Children's Church. And even though today is Graduation Sunday, I know that a few weeks ago Savannah had the opportunity to send off some of her fifth graders that will be coming to me.

And as she said, I was the only one not upset that day because it was a great day for me as we get to have new students come in. And this is just one of the many things as a blessing to children and youth because we get to just see more and more and more come in as the years go on.

And a quick reminder, because I didn't get to say anything that day, fifth grade parents as well as our senior parents, this is a great summer of transition that your students can try out both the fifth or the children's, the last of the children's events and the youth events this summer.

As well as our 12th graders, you can do the rest of your youth events and then go to the college ministry on Sunday mornings. This is a great transition time for you to try a little bit of both, to dip your toe in the water.

[1 : 1 5] Because in August, I will say bye-bye to my seniors and welcome in my new coming sixth graders. So you are encouraged to go and try all the many different things. Dip your toe in the water, get used to it before the fall.

Well, if I have not met you this morning, my name is Josh Lorenz. I'm a youth pastor here at First Baptist. And usually, the youth pastor gets to speak on graduation Sunday and then sometime in December.

But if you remember, I just had a baby and I told Brett that I might not be awake in December to come and preach that day. And so Brett was totally fine with that. But now we are here and I'm so blessed to come and get to speak in front of our church this morning.

About a year ago, I was welcomed to First Baptist Church. And Sarah and I's mindset coming in was to focus on sharing the gospel with all of our students to build relationships.

But also, we had a heart in intentionally preparing our seniors for what is next to come. Both Sarah and I had the opportunity in youth ministry to experience this, to be prepared for what college may hold.

[2 : 2 2] And so we wanted to do the same for our seniors. Because senior year, if you remember from when you were a senior, is just a fast blur of tests and college applications and essays and ceremonies and award banquets and graduation parties and last-minute planning and packing.

And then all it comes to the first day of freshman year and there you go. Senior year is over. And you wonder what happened to the last year of your life. So as we begin this morning, the thought for graduation Sunday is just simply this.

What is one thing we can say to the seniors to encourage them as they go into the next stage of their life? So today we are going to read through the entire book of Proverbs to get our seniors ready.

And that is a joke if you don't know. It's a book on wisdom. And instead, no, we're not going to go read the whole book. But seniors, I do encourage you to do so. But we are going to step away from Hebrews for just one week.

And as Clay likes to mess with Brett, we're going to step away from our favorite character, Melchizedek, for just one week. And we are going to step into a story that most of us, if you grew up in church, or if you've even been around church for just a little bit, you would know this story.

[3 : 37] We are going to turn to the book of Daniel chapter 3. And if you don't know this story, this is the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

This story tells the story of three men who were faithful to God, the king of Israel and of the Jews.

This is the same God who had led Moses and the Israelites out of Egypt.

This is the same God who rose up great men in the history of Israel, such as Joshua and David and Solomon. And now the Israelites find themselves in Babylon, a foreign land.

And God continues to be the people of Israel, even in their exile. So as we go through this passage today, there's one big point that I want us to focus on, and it is this, the fire reveals what we truly believe.

And through this point, we will learn how to be more like the three men who follow God through their circumstances, through what people will tell them to do, through what culture tries to convince them of, and focus our eyes truly on the Lord.

[4 : 47] And so what I like to do with our students is I love to hear about the context of the story, especially in the narrative. So in Daniel chapter 1 and 2, leading into what we're reading today, the people of Israel are in exile in this new land of Babylon.

And there's a ruler by the name of King Nebuchadnezzar. And Nebuchadnezzar does not worship Yahweh, the God of Israel, though he is seen in chapter 2 of Daniel, this power through the servant Daniel.

And Daniel does something that no one else could do in the land. He reveals to Nebuchadnezzar a dream that Nebuchadnezzar had, and identifies its interpretation.

And in doing so, in hearing this dream, Nebuchadnezzar identifies that Yahweh is truly the God of gods and the Lord of kings. And in response, the king promotes Daniel to ruler over a province of Babylon, as well as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

So we're going to read the entirety of chapter 3, and so we're going to break this into pieces as we go, but we're going to start with Daniel chapter 3, verse 1 through 7.

[6 : 00] And it says this, And the herald proclaimed aloud,

So as we read into the story, we're going to break this down into even further points.

So the first thing that we learn from this passage is this, is that you mimic what you worship. In the previous chapter of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar is approached by our main character of Daniel, and through God's power, Daniel tells the king of his dream that there is a large statue that will eventually be torn down.

And the head of the statue is made of gold, and that represents King Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom, but there would be a day where this kingdom would fall. And you would think that the king who claims that God is the king of kings would listen to said imagery, to said interpretation, and probably not build a statue.

And King Nebuchadnezzar, we would be wrong, does the exact thing that we don't think he should do. He builds a statue for himself. And this statue is listed as 90 feet tall.

[8 : 24] And it is something to obviously marvel at from all around the land. Now I think about when I go to different places, I love to travel, and one of the things I love to see is the history of the land that I'm in.

We went to Boston this past year, and I know that we will start mentioning the Boston mission trip here soon. If you walk around Boston, sure enough, you will find statues of the founding fathers and other important figures of Boston.

Same thing is I've gotten to go to Washington, D.C., and if you don't know, you walk around, you will see founding fathers' statues everywhere you go, especially Abraham Lincoln in the Lincoln Memorial.

And I remember being a little freshman in college and looking at how big Abraham Lincoln was and obviously thinking, this guy means a lot to the people of the United States.

This guy has a lot and is humongous in what we are supposed to be honoring him for. And so we see in Daniel that Nebuchadnezzar builds a statue 90 feet tall, and not only is it 90 feet tall, he overlays it with gold.

[9 : 34] And what this does is this is an image that would be seen for miles around, and the main goal of it is to show the power of the king of Babylon. And we see early on in Daniel 3 that all the officials are gathered to look at and worship this statue.

And in verse 4, it is demanded that when the music is to play, that you are to fall down and worship the statue that the king has made, and whoever does not will be thrown into the fiery furnace. And so we are told that there is something that needs to be worshipped, an idol of sorts, and for all of the Israelites who have been pulled into Babylon from their land, you would see, or you would hope, that they would identify this as an idol and something wrong in which to worship. Because the Israelites believe in the teachings of the Ten Commandments, and in Exodus 20, we are introduced to this, and the first two laws, the commandments are this, do not have any other gods before him, and do not make idols in your own image, nor should you worship these idols. And yet we see Israel fail time and time again to follow even the first two commandments, but people continue to do so even though it is against the law.

[10:55] And we see later that there are consequences to worshipping idols and gods other than Yahweh. And the people of Israel would know this as they would be taught this and held to this standard.

And yet we see all of the land bowed down to worship the king of Babylon and his statue. And the question really is this, how would you react?

If you were in the face of pressure, the face of culture looking to you to do the same as everybody else, what would you do? Culture loves to pressure us and put us into compromised positions where we must make a choice.

And we have to make a choice of whether we are going to go against what we have been taught as right, or will we bow down to the authority of the world. And not only this, but as we learn, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego become the central characters of the story.

And you think about this, that these men are not only facing just societal pressure, they are facing pressures from different directions. The first of which is political.

[12:02] These men are in a place of power over a province of Babylon. Everyone is looking to them and to what they are going to do. There are pressures religiously because this is a land where worshipping Yahweh is definitely not taken well.

There are pressures socially because these men will eventually take a stand against what everyone else does. And then there is obviously the pressure physically because if you are caught standing, then you will die in a fiery furnace.

And the question that these men must face is this, will they compromise and seek self-preservation? Or will they follow the commandments in which they have been given? And the question we must ask ourselves is this, so what would we worship?

What do these men do? Well, we know the story, but let's continue in Daniel chapter 3, starting in verse 8. It says this, therefore at that time, certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews.

They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, O king, live forever. You, O king, have made a decree that every man who hears the sound of the horn and the pipe and the lyre, the trigon, the harp, the bagpipe, and every kind of music shall fall down and worship the golden image.

[13:21] And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning, fiery furnace. There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

And these men, O king, pay no attention to you, and they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up. So then Nebuchadnezzar, in a furious rage, commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought.

And so they brought these men before the king, and Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them this, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up?

Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, the pipe, the lyre, the trigon, the harp, the bagpipe, and every kind of music to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well, and good.

But if you do not worship, you shall be immediately cast into a burning, fiery furnace. And who is the God who will then deliver you out of my hands? So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.

[14:29] 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.

The second point we can learn from this is that real faith stands even when it costs. So here are these men, these leaders in Babylon of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and they do something that no one else does.

They stand in refusal of the demand of King Nebuchadnezzar. And the king hears that these men refuse to bow down. And they've been told, and the king has been told this by different people from the kingdom, and whether these people had something against the Jews, we do not know.

But they come to the king and they say this, those Jews that you appointed have ignored the king and instead stand against your word. So the king brings them into the kingdom, to the throne room, and looks at these men and asks this question.

Is it true that you do not serve my gods or worship the gold statue that I have set up? He says this, so I can see with my own eyes. We'll have the music play.

[15:46] We'll play the music for you. And in front of me, bow down and worship, or you will be thrown into the fiery furnace. And I think how hard it must be for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to stare at the face of the king, not just in their own home, not just publicly, but to stare at the face of the king who holds all the power of the land, and to still disobey his law.

And in that moment, they have a choice. Do we bow to the king of Babylon, or do we stand and worship the king of all kings? And Nebuchadnezzar asks a question that sparks an incredible response.

He asks this, who is the God who will rescue you from my power? And what Nebuchadnezzar is really giving them two situations, he says this, you can either do one, keep standing for a God whom I do not see, who cannot save you, and you will die in the furnace in response.

Or, you can bow to me, the king who you can see, can hear, can touch, and who has the power to physically pull you from the fire, from the hands of the fire.

Now, we have all been asked this question in one form or another, and maybe not in the chance of being thrown into an actual fiery furnace. If that is your story, I would love to hear it because that is what incredible testimony that would be.

[17:16] But instead, we stare in the mirror and we ask this, who is the God that we will serve? Who is the God that we will serve that will eventually save us?

And obviously, if you read ahead into the Bible and to the whole theme of the text is that there is an obvious answer, but oftentimes, we look in the mirror and we think things such as this, well, I've lived quite a life by myself.

I've lived a life where I've weighed the good and the bad, and I've made some pretty good choices. I have been able to get through some hard times by myself. Maybe I'll just bet on me.

Maybe I'll just handle it by myself because there is no God that I can see or hear, so I will do it on my own. Others may look at the faces of culture and to people in our culture as seen as higher than others, and this might be a singer or an actor or a political figure, and they say, well, if I just follow them, I will find the same success that they do.

So I will mimic them and then I will find that I will have the same success as them. Others of us look to our people in our church and we say, well, if we just mimic our lives around our pastor or around our small group leader or around this or that person in our church, then obviously they have it figured out, so I'll have it figured out.

[18:50] And now, as fun as it is to have a bunch of little pastors in the room, a bunch of little Bretts following Bret everywhere and doing what he does, humanity will eventually fail you.

Following a human God will eventually fail you. That person you look to will eventually falter in something. They will eventually do something wrong that you see as such a big deal.

They will eventually say something that you might take as hurtful in the end of the world and your whole belief will crumble. That they have it all figured out, so if I just do what they do, I'll have it figured out.

And when they falter, you falter. But really, if you look to this, the God of the Bible, the one who has sent his son down across so we may forever look upon his face in eternity, the one who lives within us, guiding us to do right and wrong, only this God is the God worth worshiping.

And so what do these men do? They give a response of all responses, which I don't think I would have the courage to say to a king who is about to throw me into a furnace. They say, O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.

[20:08] 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.

They take a stand against the power in the room and say, you might be a powerful king, Nebuchadnezzar. You might have a glorious big statue overlaid with gold, but guess what? We serve a God much bigger, more powerful than you. We serve a God whose robe in Isaiah tells us that it fills a throne room. We serve a God who will strike down in literally the dream you just had every single kingdom that comes after yours and will provide us with an everlasting kingdom that we will live with him in forever.

We will serve that God, not you. We refuse to bow because we would rather do anything but bow to you, O Nebuchadnezzar, and this is a picture of real faith.

We as believers should look at this and turn to culture and repeat this. Yes, culture, you can mock me, people, you can scorn me, make fun of me, call me names, threaten me, scare me.

[21 : 25] Devil, you may throw everything in your arsenal at me, and yet I serve a bigger God than you who that one day in my text, in my Bible, says that he will defeat you forevermore and you will be nothing.

And these men show us the key to a resilient faith. These men show us the key to true obedience to the Lord in the face of danger. These men show us what it looks like to live more like God in any situation.

And so you're like, well, how's the story end? Well, if you grew up in church, you know, but let's continue in verse 19. It says this, and Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

And he ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated. And he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and to cast them into the burning, fiery furnace.

Then these men were bound in their cloaks and their tunics, their hats and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning, fiery furnace. Because the king's order was urgent and the furnace was overheated, the flame, the fire, killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

[22 : 41] And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning, fiery furnace. And 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, Oh, true. He answered and said this, 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. Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning, fiery furnace, and he declared, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out and come here. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire.

And the satraps and the prefects, the governors, and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them.

And Nebuchadnezzar answered and said this, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants who trusted him and set aside the king's command and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own god.

[23 : 56] Therefore, I make a decree, any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way.

And the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon. The third and final thing we see from the story is that God meets his people in the fire.

So in response to them telling King Nebuchadnezzar that they will not bow down to him, he tells his guards, he says, make it hotter, turn it up, turn the flame seven times hotter.

And you know what? Just for extra measure, tie them up. Make sure that they experience this to the full. And he throws them in and in doing so, sacrifices some of his own men in throwing Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the flame.

And what we see is this, is that King Nebuchadnezzar says what he is going to do, does what he says he is going to do. He throws these men into the fire and in doing so, church, we see a hard truth that we must face.

[25 : 09] Standing against Babylon, standing against the world that we live in might have earthly consequences. You might stand and find that the result is less than lovely.

You might find that in defiance of the world that you get thrown down into your own fiery furnace. But there is something that is so great is this, that no matter what the world throws at you, no matter how hot the flames of culture are, nothing can separate us from the love and the power of God. Nothing can take away our faith in the almighty saving God. And what this fire does is it doesn't snuff out God's presence, it reveals God's presence in our lives and to all of those who may see it. Seniors in the room, you will have hard times. If you haven't heard from your parents or from any adult in the room, we can tell you hard times will come.

You will face something that you are not prepared for. And oftentimes, people make this decision in the times of hardship. Obviously, because I am suffering, the Lord must not be present.

[26 : 22] The Lord must have left me. The suffering leads us to find this place of loneliness. And circumstances such as this, well, I just failed this big test.

I must not be loved by God. You must not want me to succeed in this path. Lord, this relationship ended. Lord, you must not want me to be happy to find everlasting peace in a marriage.

God, you took away this person in my life, this loved one, or this hardship is happening, a disease has taken root into one of my family members.

God, you must want me to be miserable. And in response, God, you must not be there. You see, what Nebuchadnezzar was hoping is that this fire would destroy the believers in God.

But what we just said is this, is that the fire does not do that. It instead reveals that God is present and is not just the Son of God, all lowercase as we see in Daniel, but is the God who stands with us in the fire, capital G.

[27 : 27] and these men were called out to you by the king and Nebuchadnezzar says, come out, men, I see you standing there. What do you do? Come out of the fire. And they come out and one of my favorite details is this, is that none of them smell like they've even been near a fire.

Now, I've been on a lot of campouts growing up. I've been camping with my parents because that is what they love to do. I was also in the Cub Scouts and the Boy Scouts, so we went on playing campouts as well as I was in college and what do a bunch of Christian believers do when they have an afternoon off?

They have a bonfire and a worship night. And so I've been around a fire and what I can tell you is this, everyone knows you've been near a fire. You smell it.

Okay, these men are in flames that are so hot that they're killing not only, not only them, not only is it meant to kill these men, but it also kills the men of Nebuchadnezzar.

And they walk out and their clothes are unsinged and they don't even smell of the fire. And Nebuchadnezzar in response says this, he says, to praise the angel that has saved them.

[28 : 44] And we all know who this is. This is the Son of God. This is Jesus who came to save these men from the fire. And what this really is is that this is a perfect picture of what he does on the cross.

Not only does Jesus come to save, but he comes to save everyone. Not only does he save the one who stand in the fire, but he comes and he offers himself to all who may believe.

He offers himself up to the ones who cursed him, who mocked him, who threatened to kill him, the ones who would worship anything else in a heartbeat, where a statue would be raised, they would bow down.

Everyone he came to save and he offers his life to save all of us. Jesus dies this death of the sinner.

He's thrown into the flames of judgment and he does this for a simple fact that we oftentimes overlook is that he loves us so much.

[29 : 55] He takes upon the wrath of death of sin and our place saves us so that one day we may be able to come out of the flame, out of the furnace, like these men, unharmed, not smelling like fire, just for the fact so we might find peace and love and eternity with him.

he does all of these things for us. And students, this is the good news. This is the gospel and early on in the semester, Sarah and I opened our home to our seniors and we had a few come and in that time I told our seniors this, is that there are going to be people who will one day ask you, what do you believe in?

Not just, are you a Christian, are you not, what do you believe in? Why do you believe in Jesus? Why do you believe in this Jesus figure in your life?

And I had them write down a response. What would you say? Because if not ask the question, we are unprepared and so we should prepare ourselves for what is coming next to try and prepare ourselves to say, well I believe in a king who would stand in the fire, who would die on a cross so that I may one day be in eternity with him just because he loves me.

That is why I believe in Jesus, the son of God. And today, Jesus is still wanting a relationship with us.

[31 : 32] Jesus wants it even though we may have our doubts, even though we may find ourselves in disobedience, we may find ourselves in the midst of a failure. everything we do against him, he still chooses us.

And this is why we look at this as being what standing in the face of the fire truly teaches us is that God's presence is in us and can be seen for everyone.

And seniors, this is what we want you to take away from this day. Church, this is applicable to all of us is that this, is that the fire truly reveals what you believe and in the fire God meets his people and stands with them especially when we stand for him.

Let us pray. Lord, thank you for this day. Thank you for all that you do. God, we pray over our seniors on Senior Sunday Lord, that they would go out and they would hear this message that there is a fire burning and culture ready to consume us but Lord, you will stand in the fire with us.

That you are bigger and stronger and mightier than anything that can be thrown our way. And God, we pray that we would turn and worship you.

[32 : 54] There are a bunch of idols, a bunch of statues that might rise up in our life and we might turn to those and we might look at that is the way that we are supposed to live our life. God, I pray that we would only look to you.

We would only praise you. We would only worship you for all the days that we have to come. Lord, I thank you that we have your name.

We have your kingdom to look forward to. We have the promise that you will stand with us in the fire. That you sent a son to die in our place so that we may one day be in right standing with you.

And God, until that day you just desire one thing and that is a relationship with us. So God, I pray that our seniors, that everyone in our church, those who are struggling, those who find themselves in the midst of the fire, that we would turn to you.

We would worship you. We would love you just as you have loved us. Let everyone go forward from this day and see the fire not that we are in, but the fire burning within us that shows the presence of you.

[34 : 07] It's in your name we pray. Amen. I want to invite you to stand during this time of invitation to sing a song as we respond to what God has put on our hearts this morning.

Let us stand and sing.