

Bold As Lions, Daniel 3 “The Fiery Furnace” 3/17/19

Growing up, there was a house down the street that had this great pool, big wrap around deck. And it was always pristinely maintained, they covered it in the winters, would have it cleaned regularly, never leaf or bug in this thing...but there was something that drove me crazy as a kid about this pool. I NEVER saw anyone use it! And as a kid without a pool in my backyard at the time I just could not understand how that was possible. Isn't there a law against this? How can you have a pool and never do a cannonball into it? Never have a pool party? Never even float on a raft? Now, I may or may not have jumped the fence and cannonballed into that pool when they weren't home a few times... don't do that.

I think there are many Christians who are like that neighbor down the street, maintaining a faith that never gets used. In fact, maybe who hope they never have to be put in a situation where they have to use their faith. And some of us spend a great deal of time maintaining our faith. We learn more great things about our faith, and we sing about our faith, and we talk to other people at church about our faith... but never actually put ourselves into situations where we have to use it, we want to stay comfortable and safe...or when we are faced with situations that require us to exercise our faith, we put it aside, we leave it at church...or we find that our faith has atrophied from lack of exercise. And let me take it one step further, if we have a faith that we never actually use...do we actually have a faith at all? If you don't have a faith that you use to make decisions about your life, and how you deal with challenge, and your moral decisions about your sex life or finances or a difficult marriage or politics....whatever. In what sense is that a faith? Faith is not merely head deep...intellectual assent to a set of facts that Jesus is God, that he died for our sins... yes it is that, but it is heart-deep. Faith is, “I trust and I cling to this gospel in a way that shapes and transforms my life.

“Wow, Nate you are starting off a bit strong...” Let me walk back a bit with you and encourage you because maybe I just discouraged some of you. Some of you are here trying to discover what you believe and some a bit skeptical... we are so glad you are here, I hope you know how welcome you are, safe place to discover that. Our desire is that you are in a journeying toward a Christian faith in Jesus Christ. Some of you are just beginning to learn to trust that God is real, Jesus paid it all and that God loves you. Amen. that is awesome. Some are you are just beginning to trust God with your money, or your relationships or your fears... praise the Lord, keep going because Jesus says that the faith of a mustard seed can move mountains. So all of us are in different places of faith and that is OK...This is a safe place to discover that. But some of us are lukewarm and your faith isn't being exercised at all...and I pray that the Holy Spirit breaks through, especially calloused, fearful hearts this morning so begin using your faith again, maybe like you once did long ago.

And this is what we are wrestling with through this series “Bold as Lions” a study of Daniel, What does this kind of bold faith really look like? We are building a mosaic of bold faith as we look at the examples of these young men in Daniel. We have seen in chapter 1 that bold faith refuses to give in to the pressure to conform to the status quo. We saw last week in chapter 2

that bold faith finds its source in trusting God not our intellect or personality. This week in Chapter 3 continue that mosaic of bold faith...add two more characteristics.

Two Characteristics of Bold Faith

Refuses to Bow Down

Lives Spiritually Fireproof

Refuses to Bow Down, Daniel 3:1-13

Summarize...King Nebuchadnezzar, who, by the way, is a real historical person that we can read about outside of the Bible. Well in the beginning of Chapter 3 Neb decides he's going to erect an enormous gold statue of himself, about 8 stories high. And you thought your boss's ego was out of control. Now the story doesn't actually say it is of himself, but I think we get a clue from Daniel chapter 2 because we are told about an image that Neb dreamed about.

Daniel 2:31-32

Your Majesty looked, and there before you stood a large statue—an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance. The head of the statue was made of pure gold.

A few verses later in Daniel's interpretation he tells Neb that He is that head of gold. So, we can assume that Neb wanted to make his dream because a reality and instead of just a head of gold, he made the whole statue gold. Which is ironic because in the dream, the statue comes crashing to the ground in pieces and is slain by God himself (Next Slide) But Neb's ego is so enormous that he is blinded to this. And so they have a dedication ceremony and represented there are all the nations, all the people they conquered from various lands, languages, religions. And they have an enormous orchestra there so everyone is in awe of the grandeur of the king. He commands everyone to bow down and worship his image... oh and one more minor detail...if anyone doesn't bow, they will be immediately thrown into a blazing furnace.

Let's understand what was happening here. Neb was king over a multi-cultural, religiously pluralistic society. Every land they conquered that brought captives into the kingdom. It is important to note that Neb was not demanding that everyone deny their own gods and religions. You were allowed to worship whatever gods you wanted privately, but when you are in public, you will all worship the King. This is all about public allegiance and recognition that you may have your own gods privately, but here...Neb is supreme, he is your god that orders your life. You can keep your faith privately but in public you have to be like everyone else, so bow down to who is really calling the shots.

Now we might not be asked to bow down to a gold statue, but make no mistake there is a daily demand that we face to bow down. Just like the pluralistic society of Babylon, we are told we can worship whatever we want in private, but leave it at church, leave it at home....don't bring that into the public. You can practice that at church, but don't bring that stuff into school, certainly not into your politics. Business world- if everyone around you is ruthless and barely legal, but if you are going to make it, you feel you have to be just like them and so you do...You might talk about being kind and putting others first at church...but here, that doesn't fly

because we worship the bottom line and the way you bow down is produce no matter what the cost to your integrity or your family or your fidelity. Can you see by doing that you have bowed down?

Oxford U. Press- Massive empirical study- Men, unmarried, college educated, 18-23. One raised in communities where they didn't think anything was wrong with sex outside of marriage. 23% are virgins. Other said we have a theological conviction that sex outside of marriage is wrong. But only 28% were virgins. What is this? It is, I leave my faith at church, because out there, I am told I must bow down to desire, conquest, experience. And to say you are saving yourself for marriage feels like the quickest way to draw a giant circle around yourself that says I don't belong...You feel the pressure don't you? And maybe you have convinced yourself culture is right because that is far easier than having to exercise your faith. You have bowed down.

But not SMA, they refuse to bow down. And they stick out like a sore thumb. And their peers don't like it. They snitch...

Daniel 3:9-12

"May the king live forever! 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, and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace."

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."

Brave... This is bold faith and I believe SMA knew it would cost them. If you are a Christian today, you are under the pressure to bow down...and in fact a growing pressure. Refusing to bow to culture's demands and maintaining fidelity to God today will inevitably get you a bloody nose.

Daniel 3:13-18

¹³ *Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, ¹⁴ 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?"*

¹⁵ *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?"* (Keep your god private...because here I am god)

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

This is Braveheart kind of boldness, this is Kunta Kinte, Rosa Parks, and Luther’s reformation, here I stand, I can do no other...kind of boldness. Tom Petty...This is the second characteristic of bold faith- **Is Spiritually Fireproof.** SMA say we stand in fidelity to God. We believe he will rescue...but even if he doesn’t. These young men had a heart deep faith even as they are staring death in the face. They understand that **God can rescue from death. But God will always rescue through death.** Because if you die in Him and you wake up in his arms there is nothing but liberation and freedom and joy. A few seconds of pain, and an eternity of joy...bring it on. When these men say this...they have already won. They are spiritually fireproof...This is the secret to being spiritually fireproof... Like the apostle Paul who said, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

(Next Slide) What about us today? Do you have a spiritually fireproof faith?

I believe my God is going to give me a spouse, but even if he doesn’t...I won’t compromise and settle.

I believe my God will give me a child, but even if he doesn’t...I won’t become bitter and loose my faith.

I believe my God will heal me of this disease, but even if he doesn’t...I won’t give in to fear and anxiety.

And so Neb is furious at this response, the heat of his fury is only matched by the heat of the furnace, he turns it up 7x hotter. I think at this point we can conclude that Neb is emotionally unstable. It’s one thing when a child has a tantrum...we can walk away, or send them to their room...go take it out on their stuffed animals. But when the most powerful man in the world has a tantrum, well people get burned...literally. In fact, he loses two good soldiers because of his rage as they are killed by the flames just throwing SMA into the furnace.

Now many of you know the conclusion to the story but it’s amazing to read.

Daniel 3:24-30

²⁴Then 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.” ²⁵ 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.”

²⁶ 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,

²⁷ 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.

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.

²⁹ 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." ³⁰ Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

This really happened. Amazing! Three quick, final observations I want to make from this conclusion. **1) God can use our faith to convince critics.** And often not by our convincing arguments, but by exercising our faith, how we face trials, how we are willing to stand out, turn the other cheek when we are slandered. **2) God saves through his Son.** Now who is this "son of the gods" in that furnace with them? Well, it could just be an angel, but there are times in the Old Testament when God shows up visibly like with Abraham, and Joshua...and many theologians believe these to be pre-incarnate manifestations of Jesus. They call these Christophanies. Here is what we know for sure- that God ultimately saves through his Son, Jesus Christ...not just through the literal fires in the furnace. But he saves us from the spiritual fires of Hell through Jesus. **3) The Son Walked through the Fires for us.** Why didn't God just swoop down like Superman and save, or turn off the fire or prevent it from ever happening? Why did he actually go into the furnace with them. I think because God wants us to see something about how Jesus saves. He took on the furnace, he was thrown into the fires so we wouldn't have to. He suffered and tasted death so we could come out not even smelling like smoke! No religion speaks of a god like this. No God is like ours. -

The Great Blondin illustration...

Get in the wheelbarrow. **Next Slide** Such a great picture of so many of us worshipping Jesus, singing with the crowd on Sunday morning. Jesus we love you, we worship you, thank you for dying on the cross and paying for our sins. We have so much faith in you! He says, great- put your life in my hands. Date how I desire you to date. Have conversations that honor me. Can I have the time that you spend on your computer. Would you put into my hands your finances? Will you trust me with your children? Will you trust me that I can satisfy your desires even when your spouse is not? Will you trust me to overcome your addiction so that I can show you can live without it?

No Jesus...we just want to be with the fans. I have a faith, but don't make me use it Jesus... Don't call me to stand out. We all have a wheelbarrow in front of us right now.