

Tried by Fire

- *Daniel 3:1-30*

- **There are certain groups of people that willingly day in and day out put their life on the line b/c their job demands it, but more importantly there are committed to what they are doing.**
 - Firefighters
 - Policemen
 - Armed Forces
- **I respect these men & women very much & know that they do what they do not for the applause of others, because unfortunately many of these positions never receive a Thank You, but they do it for the love of this country, the love of their families, and the love of serving others. And even if giving their life in standing for what they believe in is required of them, they would be more than willing to do it. There is a lot said of a person is willing to stand for right even in the face of consequences.**
- **In Rome, there still stands today remnants of the great amphitheater where many Christians lost their lives because they refused to deny their allegiance to Jesus Christ.**
 - Polycarp, a disciple of the apostle John, was one of those early Christian martyrs. When ordered to renounce his faith and worship the Roman emperor, Polycarp responded before a roaring crowd of spectators, "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?"
 - At this point, the official in charge threatened him with wild beasts that were ready to be released from their cages. But Polycarp answered, "Call them then, for we are not accustomed to repent of what is good in order to adopt that which is evil; and it is well for me to be changed from what is evil to what is righteous."
 - Seeing Polycarp's determination not to turn his back on Jesus Christ, his would-be executioner threatened to burn him at the stake. But again, this great man of God responded, "Thou threatenest me with fire which burneth for an hour, and after a little is extinguished, but art ignorant of the fire of the coming judgment and of eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. But why tarriest thou? Bring forth what thou wilt."
- **Though we have many stories from yester year, the truth is many around our world today are sacrificing their freedoms, their health, their possessions, and in some cases even their lives b/c of their willingness to stand for the truths of God's Word.**
- **As Christians down through the centuries have faced death for refusing to deny Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, we are reminded tonight of the confidence that 3 young men had as they stood for God even in the face of death.**
 - These young men who were thrown into a fiery furnace because they refused to bow down and worship a huge statue constructed by King Nebuchadnezzar.
 - God saw fit to miraculously deliver these young men from physical death because of their faith. But the greater illustration here is that they were also willing to die! They had no knowledge that God was going to preserve them until they were in the midst of the roaring flames.
 - But even in the midst of death, their faith in God nor their stand for the things of God never wavered.
- **I want take time to read the entire chapter tonight, but there are some important statements I would like to make in regards to Daniel 3.**
 - At the end of Daniel 2, we see Nebuchadnezzar admit that Daniel's God was greater than his, but we never see him trust in the One, True God.

- As time passed, the King apparently forgot about this miraculous event & decided instead to make for himself his own image of gold. (3:1-6)
 - The Bible states that this image for 90' high & 9' wide in stature.
 - After completion of the structure, he thought it appropriate to issue an order that all of his important officials throughout the country come together for a special "dedication of the image". As they all stood before this gigantic monument that towered high above them, they were commanded to "fall down and worship" the image.
- Now the question arises, why did the King see fit to do this? And for me the only answer is his ego.
 - During Nebuchadnezzar's reign, he had already become the world's greatest emperor, which was symbolized "by the head of gold" in his earlier dream.
 - He had conquered "peoples, nations and men of every language".
 - But to rule was not enough. He wanted to be worshiped, which was symbolized by this huge statue.
- So as Nebuchadnezzar's orchestra began to play, "all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up" (3:7) ... with the exception of 3 young men.
 - Now we are talking about thousands of people bowing down to this object & here are 3 young men who refuse to bow down.
 - Clearly it would be a violation of the law that God gave to Moses at Mount Sinai. The Lord had made it clear in Exodus 20:4-6 that no person in Israel was to engage in this kind of idolatry. God had thundered from the holy mountain the following specific exhortations:
 - These young man had determined that they would not bow down to any other god. I will remind you that these young men wound up in Babylonian captivity because their fathers and forefathers had violated the Lord's commands and had worshiped the gods of Canaan.
 - They were determined to break this cycle of idolatry in Israel.
 - Of course they were spotted very easily (vv.8-12) & several of the King's "tattle tales" decided to "rat" on the young men & bring a charge before the King.
 - Then the rage & anger of Nebuchadnezzar boiled to a point of fury (vv.13-15) as he proclaimed that they be killed for their disobedience to his decree.
 - Now v.15 is an interesting verse, b/c it is almost as if the King decided to reiterate the punishment one more time just to make sure they were clear about their decision.
- **Now, lets pause for a moment & lets carefully read the response these young men had in vv.16-18, because this is a turning point in this story, but it was also a turning point in their faith.**
 - Once again, these young men have been brought to this point and put to this test perhaps for no other reason than to prove that God is worth living for.
 - But now, their faith has brought them to the point of death. There comes a moment in time when all of the "wisdom and tact" in the world will no longer work in relating to evil people. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had reached that point.
 - Any other approach would compromise their faith and their relationship with the one true God. So they made their response straightforward as they solidified their commitment to the One, True God.
- **Now Nebuchadnezzar was furious at this point & commanded the furnace be heated 7 times hotter (vv.19-23) & the Bible tells us that they bound the 3 men & cast them into the furnace.**
 - I believe deep down, Nebuchadnezzar desperately wanted to win this battle and prove once and for all that his power was greater than any "foreign god."

- If he were not fearful and threatened, why then would he have to make the fire so hot? A normal fire should get the job done, right? But instead he made it 7 times hotter.
 - Then he even went to the trouble of having these men bound just to make sure no one escaped.
 - And as they were cast into the fire, the Bible states that the fire was so hot it consumed the guards that cast them in.
- **Then we are given the miraculous outcome of this story. The King noticed immediately that something was not ordinary. “Did we not cast three men, bound into the fire? But I see 4 men, loose & walk around & the 4th is like the Son of God.”**
- **Think of the impact this experience must have had on all of the wise men and chief officials in Babylon.**
- They have just seen a miracle from God & a faith that had literally been tried by fire.
 - God had once again revealed His glory to some of the most significant unbelievers in the world, and He did it through the faith of 3 young men who were willing to serve & honor God & God alone.
- **Now, how does this story relate to us & how can we use this in our own faith? There are several principles that we can take from this story:**

1. Principle 1. God always honors our faith, but He does not promise He will always deliver us from the fire.

- a. These young men definitely had a strong faith. They knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Lord was "able to save" them from a fiery grave ([3:17](#)). But even if God allowed them to be consumed by the flames, they would "not worship the image of gold" ([3:18](#)).
- b. Paul said the same thing as he wrote the church from a Roman prison – “According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.”
- c. Other Christians have been stoned, burned, crucified, tortured, and even killed for the cause of Christ, but all of them were "commended for their faith" ([11:39](#)).
- d. There’s not a service that goes by that we don’t pause to pray for those who are sick & suffering here at this church.
 - i. And with each prayer, I have the faith that God can heal any need & any sickness if He chooses to do so.
 - ii. But I also understand that some sickness is not intended to be healed right now & that God has never promised to always heal and deliver that person from sickness. If that were true, some people would never die.
 - iii. But when a person is not healed in the way that I see, it does not diminish our faith.
 - iv. God is a sovereign God who makes the ultimate decisions about life and death.
 - 1. Sometimes He responds to our specific prayers and heals—sometimes completely and sometimes partially.
 - 2. At other times, He responds to our prayers by giving sustaining grace to live with the illness, just as He did for Paul & countless others.

2. Principle 2. No matter what the outcome, as Christians we should never compromise our faith.

- a. These young men understood that others would fall to worship other gods, but they chose to stand for their God, even if it meant death. To them, there was nothing, not even life itself, worth turning to any other god for.

- b. As part of Paul’s prayer, he understood that the only way he would survive would be through the prayers of others & more specifically the “help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ”. But whether he was released or not was not the point; but that he would continue to stand for Christ “unashamed” was his battle cry. (Rom. 1:16)
3. **Principle 3. When a Christian is persecuted in this life, he will always be delivered—either to live life on this earth or to experience total freedom in the life to come.**
- a. Time & time again, Paul was delivered from prison & God allowed him other opportunities to continue to serve & minister to others. But the day finally came where he would never be free, at least on this earth, again. (II Timothy 4:6)
 - b. According to the Bible, Paul was “delivered” from his body & we read in history that he died a martyr’s death. But even in death, Paul had victory. No wonder he could write the words in vv.7-8 –

- i. “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”
- ii. Paul was not fearful of death b/c he knew who held both life & death
- iii. There was a missionary couple named John and Betty Stam who were sent to China & taken captive by communist bandits on December 7, 1934. They demanded a \$20,000 ransom, but before anyone could negotiate a settlement, the missionaries were left dead beside the road. Their heads were literally severed from their bodies.
- iv. When news of this tragedy reached Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, the school where they had prepared for the mission field, Dr. Will Houghton, who was president, wrote a poem in their honor entitled "By Life or by Death."

So this is life, this world with all its pleasures,
 Struggles and tears, a smile, a frown, a sigh,
 Friendship so true, and love of kin and neighbor,
 Sometimes 'tis hard to live—always, to die!
 The world moves on, so rapidly the living
 The forms of those who disappear replace,
 And each one dreams that he will be enduring—
 How soon that one becomes the missing face!
 In life or death—and life is surely flying,
 The crib and coffin carved from the self-same tree.
 In life or death—and death so soon is coming—
 Escape I cannot, there's no place to flee—
 But Thou, O God, hast life that is eternal;
 That life is mine, a gift through Thy dear Son,
 Help me to feel its flush and pulse supernal,
 Assurance of the morn when life is done.
 Help me to know the value of these hours,
 Help me the folly of all waste to see;
 Help me to trust the Christ who bore my sorrows,
 And thus to yield for life or death to Thee.
 In all my ways be glorified, Lord Jesus,
 In all my ways guide me with Thine own eye;
 Just when and as Thou wilt, use me, Lord Jesus,
 And then for me 'tis Christ, to live or die.