

MONDAY, 4/27/20

SERIES: Choosing Faith Over Fear

Speaker: Nat Crawford (w/Arnie & Cara)

Title: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego Pt. 1

Are you in a trial? I would guess in light of the COVID-19, you are in a trial of great magnitude. You're either working from home, you're furloughed, you're alone in your home, you're separated from friends and family members, or you're cut off from your church. You can't do the things you loved to do. Your income is in jeopardy. Your income is insecure. Your health is suspect. Your procedures were rescheduled.

A number of years ago, when I encountered a major trial through a health battle of my son, I began to wrestle with three questions regarding trials: One - Is it possible to be ready for the tests and trials in my life? Secondly, does being ready lead to a guaranteed positive outcome? Or a similar question might be if I prepare enough, can I avoid the trial behind these trials? Lastly, does anything good come from facing tests and trials in my life? Is there purpose?

I have no doubt each one of you has asked these questions or questions like them as you've faced your own trials. Regardless of your unique trials and circumstances, today, we hope to answer these questions about the preparation and purpose of our trials.

Before we dig into Daniel 3, let me give a brief overview of the past two chapters in case you're not familiar or can't remember.

In Chapter 1, God allows Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to be brought into Babylon to serve under King Nebuchadnezzar, where they rather quickly were able to serve the King directly. In Chapter 2, Daniel is tasked with interpreting the King's dream about a statue. Daniel interprets the dream accurately with the help of God. Nebuchadnezzar is amazed and falls down before Daniel and recognizes God as God of gods. Chapter 2 concludes with Daniel and his friends being promoted to important administrative positions. Things are looking up and good for Daniel and his friends. And that's where we pick it up now in Daniel, Chapter 3, Verse 1.

King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. ² Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. ³ [...And they gathered]. And they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. ⁴ And the herald proclaimed aloud, "You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, ⁵ that when you hear the sound of the instruments, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. ⁶ And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace." ⁷ Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sounds, all the peoples, nations,

and languages fell down and worshiped the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

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Amazing isn't it? Things were looking up and easy for these young men, but so quickly, things have turned. Sounds pretty familiar doesn't it?

Now, we don't know how long it's been since the dream and now. Some commentators suggest about 2-3 years. Regardless, of how long it has been, the King is still in charge and still very much a Babylonian at heart. He builds this ginormous statue as a mechanism to 1) solidifying his power if not even his deification and 2) establish a national religion with no exception. This is further confirmed by the fact he gathers administrators of various degrees from all over for this orientation and kick-off ceremony. This is to be the law of the land and all were to follow it...or else.

Now, from what we can tell from Chapter 2, we can assume that these men were committed to their faith. Daniel 2:8 says, "But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the King's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself."² Daniel is leading by example and encouraging those who he leads to living in a way that is pleasing to God. So, from what we can tell, Daniel and his three friends have proved themselves loyal to God while living in a foreign land. But now the stakes have changed for noncompliance. It wasn't minor consequence. Now it's death if you do not bow down before this idol. This is a problem for these Israelites. Do you know why? Because one of the Ten Commandments is that you shall have no other gods before God - no bowing down to this statue.

But it would seem from the last 2 chapters, that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were committed to their faith. They had trained well. They were prepared for tests of any kind. And we too should **Be Prepared**.

As Christians, we are living in a fallen world. It's full of pain and suffering. It's riddled with disappointments and shattered dreams. That's why we should be prepared.

Discussion

N: Cara, not to put you on the spot here in the message, but I'm going to anyway. Here we are living in a season that is frankly unheard of, and I don't think any of us saw it coming. But like I said, as Christians, we need to be prepared for suffering and trials in a fallen world. Why do you think we struggle with accepting this?

C: Well, right now for me personally, because we're Americans, and things like this don't happen in America. With that being said, I think for a lot of people, if they're sold a prosperity gospel, where if you believe in God, good things are going to come. I think that's why people really struggle with stuff like this. I'm a believer; this shouldn't be happening to me.

N: So Arnie, what are your thoughts on this? Why do you think we're struggling with accepting trials and suffering?

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Da 3:1-7). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Da 1:8). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

A: So I think it really comes back to as Christ followers, are we on a cruise ship or a battleship? And it just really, it boils down to that. What I think is so interesting, especially the work that we're doing at the Center for Bible Engagement, is everybody is struggling and that is a tremendous opportunity to really shine for the Lord if you take it as an opportunity, instead of being buried with despair and discouragement and worry. This is the battlefield and welcome to it. And for me in my own personal walk, it's much, much easier to be in the battlefield and have it right in your face all the time, than to be subtle, thinking you're on a cruise ship, and isn't life wonderful, and really doing nothing on a spiritual level.

C: Do you feel though Arnie, that your faith, it almost feels like sometimes it goes to sleep if you're not in some sort of a struggle?

A: I think it's very easy for your faith to go into a sleep and you know, my concept of trying to move closer to Jesus, more today than you were yesterday, not moving is actually stepping back away from Jesus. So falling asleep at the wheel, if you will, is really not good. It's much better to be moving forward. So yeah, times like this, you can't help but be on fire for Jesus, or just a total wreck. It does, you know, I see both ends of it.

N: Yeah. I think one common thread in something you said, both of you, was it comes down to who we're listening to. You know, Cara, you talked about the prosperity gospel and that's a message that some people are teaching. Arnie, you talked about the concept of a battlefield or a battleship, versus a cruise ship. Well, again, who are you listening to? Where are you getting your information? I think as Christians, it's so important that we keep coming back to the Bible as our source of truth, so that we can know what God says and how we are to live in a fallen world. Arnie, you talked about the work we're doing at the Center for Bible Engagement and some of the work we're doing here at Back to the Bible. And part of that is encouragement. And if there's one word that I would use to describe you, well there's probably a lot of words I could use, but one that often comes to mind first is encourager. And I mean that. You're an encourager as a boss, but you're also an encourager as a friend, but you're also a spiritual encourager. Many people are feeling overwhelmed by life today. What message of encouragement would you give those listeners today?

A: I think it's time to step up. You know, at the Center for Bible Engagement, we keep a very strong look at where people are spiritually on a daily basis. And the one thing that I'm seeing repeatedly every day, is this theme of being spiritually stuck, and not growing, not moving. It's almost like the deer in the headlights kind of approach. And I know from personal experience, as well as a researcher, if you're spiritually stuck, you are prime target for Satan. And when you're stuck, things go wrong. And we've seen it over and over. I've seen it in my own life. So my challenge for the listeners today is to start moving forward. Start doing something for Jesus. Keep getting your mind focused on Him and away from yourself.

N: That is so good. The reality is, none of us coast to growth. Growth is intentional and I think we could all easily coast right now, but that's not what God would have us do. I'm just curious, Cara, how are you being intentional about your own growth and not being spiritually stuck during this time of trial?

C: Well, I've found that in my experience, to tell people about Jesus and evangelize, is a great reminder for me. It's a mission. I can tell people about Jesus and it grows my faith at the same time. Because when I evangelize, I get to go back to my first love in that testimony, that minute, that moment that I fell in love with Jesus, and I can tell other people about it. But it's just a good

reminder, and then I can tell people about Jesus. So to me it's like a win win. It's all relational. Does that make sense?

Nf: 100 percent, I love it. I love it. Yeah. There are two words that come to mind when I think of you. One actually is encourager, but also is evangelist, and for you an opportunity like this, I mean it's spiritual jet fuel to keep going again.

Well, let's get back to Daniel 3, and continue to wrestle with this idea of being prepared. What do I mean by "be prepared?" Being prepared means that we know and accept that being a Christian does not make us exempt from tests and trials. Now, we all know this, but most don't accept it.

It's like our wedding vows, for those of us who are married or have been married. We say, "I take you to be my lawfully wedded spouse, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part." What we really mean or accept is "for better, richer, and health." But we all get to that point where the fullness of our vows become real. We finally understand what the "worse, sickness, and poorer" means. It shouldn't have come to us as a shock, because we should be prepared.

As a Christian, life is not going to be easy – if not harder. Unfortunately, some of the most popular authors and preachers promise health, wealth, and prosperity for Christians. They say if you are a Christian and you aren't experiencing this blessing, you simply aren't "naming it and claiming it." Well, friends, if you can find those concepts in the Bible, I'll take you to lunch. But you won't find them. They are not in there.

What is in the Bible are passages like Matthew 10, where Christ Himself prepared us, "You will be hated because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved" (Matt. 10:22). That's encouraging, right?

Listen to Jesus' half-brother James, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, *when you encounter various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness* (James 1:2-4)" or another word for steadfastness would be perseverance.

Now notice that James says, "*if you encounter trials.*" Oh wait, that's not what James says, is it? He says *when you experience trials.*

The Greek word here for experience has the imagery of a person who is minding their own business. They're carrying on life as usual, but out of nowhere, someone comes up and hits them in the back of the head and robs them blind. They never saw it coming. So preparation means knowing that trials and hardship and disappointments are going to happen.

Being prepared doesn't just mean knowing it's going to happen. My wife is primarily a stay-at-home mom, but that's not all she does. She's also a specialty cake decorator and she makes works of art. But she doesn't just make cakes; she has to prepare. She knows that she needs to be constantly learning and growing her skills to meet the demands of clients. What if someone wants that cake with crystal bubbles or a life-size, realistic catfish? Am I serious? A catfish?!? I am. She's been asked, and she nailed it. But she is always preparing.

That's what we need to be doing—always preparing for the trials of life. That's why Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 4: ⁷"Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; ⁸for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it

holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come³” Christians who are prepared will train for godliness by reading God’s Word. They’ll be intimately involved with the body of Christ. They’ll be in constant communication with God through prayer. They’ll be actively pursuing knowing about God and knowing Him intimately.

When we prepare this way, we’ll be able to stand like these men did. We’ll be able to stand with perseverance, with grit, with faithfulness, as we experience trials of various kinds. Our perseverance in past trials prepares us for living out our convictions in the future trials.

Discussion

N: Arnie, these young men are faced with hard decisions. They have to choose fear or faith, trust or disbelief. We're faced with the same choices today. What has helped you choose trust and faith over fear and disbelief?

A: Man, that's a great question. And it's one that I often wrestle with. Sometimes I'll tell people, you know, are we stepping out in faith or are we stepping out in stupidity, because oftentimes they both can look very, very similar. And with hindsight being 20/20, and always being judged by the business community, you can be stepping out in faith and you look like a complete idiot. So, and faith is very hard to be logical about, and to rationalize, but one of the things that's really helped me all my life, is other people that have stepped out in faith. And I know even as a nonbeliever, I would watch people who stepped out in faith and it had tremendous impact. And that just changed everything I did both as a nonbeliever and now as a Christ follower. Stepping out in faith is not an option. It's the only thing you can do. So it's really been helpful to me, the people that have been examples in my life.

N: Yeah. That's what I call borrowing the faith of others. We look at the people around us and people who have gone before us who have lived an authentic faith, not a perfect faith, but an authentic faith, and borrowing their faith to strengthen your own. That's awesome. Cara, what about you? What's helped you choose to trust and choose faith over fear and disbelief?

C: Well, so many times, for me, I've had to fall back on what I know to be true about the character of God. He can't go back on His promises and He doesn't lie and He loves me. So no matter what my feelings are, I know I'm going to be okay.

N: That's awesome. And that's exactly right. Looking at God's character, because as we know, God doesn't change. And for me, that's very similar to what I use to choose faith and to trust God, is thinking of God's faithfulness in the past. I remember a few years ago over Christmas, our son was having some type of seizures and we took him into the hospital. We got him tested and we weren't sure what was going to happen. But a doctor said, I think he has epilepsy, you know, he's having some type of epileptic seizure, based on these scans. So we took him up to UNMC for a five day study, and the epileptologist, he said, you know, based on his original scans and everything, I see it looks like he had epilepsy, but now we, after this five day study, either he was divinely healed, or maybe misdiagnosis, but it really doesn't matter either way, your son is healthy now. And during that time was it hard? Yeah. Was it scary? Yeah, at moments, but my wife and I had a consistent peace, because we knew that God had been faithful in our lives, in our marriage and in the health of our other children, and they had health issues as

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (1 Ti 4:7–8). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

well. But we knew God's faithfulness had been consistent, and so we knew he would be faithful in that trial with our youngest son. So we looked back at God's faithfulness to help us choose faith in those trials.

Okay, what about this? Paul wrote in First Timothy that we are to train for godliness for that is valuable for life and the life to come. I think that's something we know, we intellectually know, that we can probably quote that verse, but not sure if we really believe it. I mean, if we did, we'd spend more time in Bible studies attending church and using great apps like goTandem. But I have no doubt that many listeners do believe this. They know that they should be training for godliness, but they're not really doing it. It's going back to what we talked about earlier. They kind of coast, so they don't know where to start training for godliness. They need a jumpstart. How would you guys coach and encourage them to begin training for godliness today?

C: Well, apps like goTandem. I mean, I know it's our app, but what I like about it, is it's going to hit you at the time of day when you need that information. It's a small amount of information that will help you grow a lot. I think too, we put a lot of pressure on ourselves that our Christian walk, how we feed ourselves, has to look similar to another Christian. So if this Christian reads the Bible every morning at this time, you think that you have to feed yourself that way, when there are so many ways that you can get a spiritual growth through listening to sermons, or Bible audio, or all of these things. As long as it's the Word of God, it's however you prefer to get it in you, and to not compare yourself to how somebody else does it.

N: And that's such a key component. Not looking to someone else and saying, Oh, I need to be like that, or I should be like that. That's not fair to us. And I don't think God expects that. That's really wise. What about you, Arnie?

A: I have a completely different take than Cara, which is not unusual. So now this is probably before you were born, but they had this show called *Gomer Pyle*, and the Sergeant would go "Pyle, Move, move, move, move". And one of the things that I see at the opposite end of the spectrum, is people spend their entire life in training, going to seminars, doing all of these things and preparing, and never stepping out. So I think it's a fine balance of moving out. You don't need that next course on discipleship to witness to your neighbor. I've seen Cara put this into action over and over again. Learning godliness though is something too, that is a spiritual thing and it's a heart thing, that I don't know if any amount of classes can make you godly. And that's something that is a challenge. I know for me, being an old grumpy guy, probably a lot of people don't see, "Oh wow, he's really a godly example."

C: I actually can add to that, because in my own spiritual walk, my own testimony, I actually went to the Resurrection, because I knew that was the crux of the whole Christian faith. And I researched that and found it to be true in my head. But it took me a long time in my heart to understand what the relationship was. So I believed, but it wasn't until I went through a health struggle, that I go, "Oh, wait a minute. This has nothing to do with me, but how I will glorify God in this struggle." And then He came into my heart. So there is definitely a disconnect between too much head and not enough heart. I agree with that, Arnie.

N: Yeah, I think you both have covered the basis of it. It is a heart piece and it's also a head piece. You have to find something that works for you to get into God's Word, to know what He has said, and what He has prescribed for us and the truth of His love for us. But you can't just stop there. You can't just know it intellectually. You have to begin to embrace it, to take it into your whole being and then start living it out. So it's knowing and doing. And when we take that

knowledge, and then we start taking baby steps of faith, we begin to see that faith grow, God work, and we see His faithfulness. Great discussion guys.